



A VERY GALLANT GENTLEMAN!



The Magnet 1^d
Library

No. 520. Vol. XII.



SAVING VALENCE!

Copyright in the United States of America.

A Magnificent New
Long Complete
Tale of
Harry Wharton & Co.
at
Greyfriars School.

A VERY GALLANT GENTLEMAN!

By
Frank
Richards.

THE FIRST CHAPTER The Voice of Rumour!

I TELL you it's a rotten lie!"

It was Bob Cherry of the Remove who spoke, and he spoke angrily.

Harold Skinner shrugged his shoulders.

"It may be," he said coolly. "But if it is, it's not my lie. Ask your pal Clavering whether it's true or not!"

Bob's face changed.

"If Clavering says it—" he began slowly.

"It's true, of course!" snapped Skinner. "A fellow who has gained the approval of the Frabjous Five can't tell lies even if he tries."

"If Clavering says so," went on Bob, "he's made a mistake, that's all. He wouldn't tell a lie about it. He's not your sort, Skinner. But he may have been mistaken. He doesn't know the seniors very well yet. It might have been Loder, or Carne, or Walker, or Valence, but it couldn't have been Courtney."

"You're right, Cherry," said Vernon-Smith. "Courtney's the very last chap in the Sixth for little games of that sort, not even excepting old Wingate or Gwynne. I've never known a straighter fellow than Courtney, any way you like to take him. He's clean white all through."

"You think a heap more of him than he does of you, Smithy!" sneered Skinner.

"That's likely enough. He hasn't any particular reason to think well of me," replied the Bounder coolly. "Very few people have, for that matter."

It might be true; but Skinner was one of the few, and he knew it, and everyone else there knew it. But gratitude seldom lasted long in Harold Skinner.

Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, Nabob of Bhanipur, whom his chums called Inky, came into the Common-room just then, with the new fellow, Leonard Oswald Clavering.

There was a bit of a mystery about Clavering. His study-mates, Stott and Snoop, did not like him at all; but that was not on account of the mystery. It was because he was not their sort, which, seeing what sort Snoop and Stott were, was nothing against Clavering—quite the contrary, indeed.

Nor did the fact that Ponsonby of Highcliffe was his enemy tend to show that there was anything against him. Ponsonby was apt to be the enemy of any decent fellow.

Anyway, the Famous Five had taken to Clavering, in spite of a reserve on the part of the new boy that they did not always find it easy to understand. And Vernon-Smith, who alone at Greyfriars knew that Leonard Clavering was really Tom Redwing of Hawkscliff, the son of a sailor, was his firm friend. For Tom Redwing had saved the Bounder's life, and Vernon-Smith, with all his faults, had a livelier sense of gratitude than Skinner.

"What's the row?" growled Johnny Bull, who saw at a glance that there was something wrong between Bob Cherry and the cad of the Remove.

"Nothing's the row," replied Skinner. "Now Clavering's here, it can be settled in a minute."

Clavering looked uncomfortable. He was sailing under false colours at Greyfriars, and though the circumstances were such that no great blame could be attached to him even by the most severe if the whole story were known, he was naturally sensitive about it.

"What's Clavering got to do with it?" Wharton said. "If you're trying to rake up that silly yarn of Pon's, Skinner, you're dead off it. So don't you try it!"

"I'm not," said Skinner. "Smithy settled that, didn't you, Smithy? A chap like Pon, livin' in glass houses and all that, can always be got at, can't he, Smithy? And when it comes to nobblin' anyone, Smithy's the man for the job—eh, Smithy? Pon daren't speak out, because Smithy's got him in a cleft stick. And so there's no more to be said about Clavering, is there? Of course, a chap may think what he likes, but he can't say it."

"Hold your poisonous tongue!" rapped out the Bounder.

Clavering had first reddened, then paled, and the Bounder, determined to stand by him in spite of his refusals to admit anything, felt angry on his account.

"I'll hold it, certainly. I've nothing more to say—at present," replied Skinner meaningly.

"Skinner says that you saw Courtney of the Sixth coming out of the Cross Keys, Clavering," said Bob Cherry, in his downright way. "Is that correct?"

Clavering nodded.

"You're quite sure?"

"Yes. I couldn't be mistaken. But I didn't tell Skinner. I only mentioned it to Ogilvy, and I wasn't aware that there was anyone else near."

"That's right," said Donald Ogilvy. "And I don't think Clavering would have mentioned it at all but for something I happened to say. He'd got across with that sweep Loder, and I told him a thing or two about the beauty."

"Snoop told me," said Skinner, with an evil grin. Snoop was by way of being a pal of Skinner's, but friendship did not count for much with Skinner when he saw a chance of making mischief. "He said Clavering told him."

"Snoop and I are not on speaking terms," Clavering said coldly.

"Where is Snoop?" growled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, what does Snoop matter?" said the Bounder. "It's no news to anyone here that Snoop isn't particular what he listens to. Clavering's admitted that he said it. But I think he must be mistaken."

Clavering shook his head. He seemed to be quite sure that there was no possibility of a mistake.

"When was it?" asked Squiff, other-

wise Sampson Quincy Ifley Field—but life is too short for names like that.

"Last night, between tea and prep," answered the new boy. "I got leave to go down to Friardale, and I met a Highcliffe fellow there—Derwent, you know. He seems a very decent sort. He had come to the post-office for something, as I had, and we strolled along together for a bit. We were passing the pub when Courtney came out alone."

"You're sure it was Courtney?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Oh, quite. He isn't like any other fellow here, and the light from some room inside fell full on him as he came out of the door. Besides, Derwent knows him. He gave a low whistle, in a kind of surprised way, and said, 'Now, I shouldn't have expected that!'"

Skinner laughed mockingly.

"Only George Washington rising from the dead could improve on that evidence!" he said. "Here's Clavering. You chaps are chock-full of faith in him; I don't know why. And he can call in Derwent to support him, and you all think Derwent's no end straight. Courtney hasn't got a leg left to stand on. He's convicted of pub-hauntin', and it only remains for sentence to be passed upon him. I'm not sure that we can do that, and I don't want to, for one, but I dare say Wharton does. It's an awful shock to Wharton. Look at his face!"

Harry Wharton did look worried.

There were fellows in the Sixth whom every decent junior liked and respected. Honest, rugged Wingate, with the heart of gold; breezy, jovial Gwynne; North, and Faulkner—they had all earned the right to be held above such low games as Loder and Carne practised regularly, and Walker and Valence at times.

And no one of them all had a cleaner record than Arthur Evans Courtney. Every fellow who had been at Greyfriars more than a term or two could recall a dozen instances of sportsmanlike and chivalrous behaviour on his part, but never an instance of stepping aside from the straight path.

It was Courtney who had refused even to be nominated for the captaincy when his chum Wingate had been deposed. He had stood by Wingate through thick and thin, loyal always. It was Courtney who had saved Valence from punishment and disgrace at heavy cost to himself. And he owed nothing to Valence. They had never been close chums, as he and Wingate had been and were.

It is true that Courtney and Valence's sister Violet were great friends. Perhaps the feeling between them was something more than mere friendship. More than one of the Removites thought of that now, but none mentioned Violet Valence's name.

The Bounder spoke out, though.

"I haven't any doubt that Clavering saw Courtney, as he is so sure of it," he said. "But I'm jolly certain that Courtney wasn't at the Cross Keys on any such errand as Skinner asks us to believe."

"Excuse me, Smithy!" struck in

Skinner, with elaborate politeness. "I haven't asked anyone to believe anything. I have my own opinion, but I haven't even expressed that."

"But we know it's nasty, as it's yours, Skinner!" snapped Johnny Bull.

"And we know that your opinion is otherwise, as Courtney happens to be one of the little tin gods of the Famous Five!" sneered Skinner. "But it's queer that Wharton should look so worried about it, as it's so jolly certain everything's above board. Don't you think it's queer, Stott?"

"Oh, rather!" said Stott. "Don't worry, Wharton! If it's all right, it's all right, and there's nothing to worry about, you know. And if it ain't all right you won't get sacked for it, so I don't see why it concerns you at all!"

"Do you want your nose pulled, Stott?" roared Bob Cherry.

"No, you idiot! What do you want to pull— Yaroooooh! Keep him off, somebody!"

But nobody troubled to keep Bob off.

Johnny Bull started towards the door.

"Whither is the bendfulness of your footsteps, my esteemed and ludicrous chum?" purred Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh, in his weird and wonderful English.

"I'm going to pull Snoop's nose!" snorted Johnny. "There wouldn't have been any of this if Snoop hadn't first listened and then talked. I don't mind Stott having his nose pulled; Bob can pull it off, for all I care—it's no ornament, anyway. But I think Snoop's wants pulling harder!"

And, as Johnny Bull generally meant what he said, there seemed little doubt that, unless he failed to find Snoop, Snoop's nose would be pulled harder than Stott's had been—though Stott's was red and swollen when the vigorous Bob had finished with it, and turned to grab Skinner's.

But Skinner had prudently mizzled!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

In the Springtime of their Youth!

RUMOUR was fabled by the ancients to have a hundred tongues; and the fable is easy of credence to anyone who has ever noticed how quickly a story spreads in a school.

Within twenty-four hours there was scarcely a fellow at Greyfriars—from George Wingate, the skipper, to the newest and tearfullest fag in the Second—who had not heard that Arthur Courtney had been seen coming out of the Cross Keys.

Yes, there was one—Courtney himself!

It is often the person most concerned who is the last to hear that gossip is busy with his name.

While Wingate was knitting his brows over the story Hammersley had just told him—while Loder and Carne chuckled together over the same story—while Coker of the Fifth was telling Potter and Greene that he didn't believe a word of it—while Temple & Co. discussed it, with expressions of regret that Courtney should have gone wrong, if he had gone wrong, which, as Fry said, wasn't an absolute cert yet—while the Famous Five and Squiff and Tom Brown and Delarey and Peter Todd and the Bouncer took counsel together as to whether something ought not to be done to muzzle the rotters who were spreading the yarn—while Tabb of the Third offered to fight anyone who said it was true—while the Second, led by Dicky Nugent and Gatty, bumped Sammy Bunter for saying he knew it was—Arthur Courtney, his ears not burning

at all, wheeled his bike to the gates, mounted, and rode off to keep an appointment.

It was a wonderful day for so early a period of the year. The sun shone almost warmly; the sky was cloudless, and here and there a deluded bird sang as if it felt sure the winter was over-past. One might almost have fancied that the hedges, a week before snow-laden, were sprouting now.

And Courtney smiled, though there was worry at his heart.

His appointment was not at the Cross Keys. It had for object the giving someone an account of the result of his errand there.

The result had not been by any means what he would have wished. He was still gravely concerned at the peril of his chum—still in doubt what his next move should be.

Yet for all that his heart sang within him. For he was going to meet Violet Valence!

Courtney's parents were long since dead. His nearest relative was a crusty old uncle. They had never got on well together; and to the lonely Greyfriars senior the two people who mattered most in the world were George Wingate and Vi Valence.

A year ago Wingate might have stood first. But it was no longer so. Arthur Courtney had reached an age when it is quite possible for a fellow of strong feelings to be very sincerely and wholly in love. And he loved the pretty, brown-haired sister of graceless Rupert Valence with all his heart and soul.

He had never told her so. No words of more than friendship had passed between them. But he believed she understood.

So, for all his worry, he felt happy as he sped over the miles that separated Greyfriars from the trysting-place.

He was before his time; but she was waiting for him, standing, fur-clad, beside her bicycle under the leafless branches of an old oak in a little-frequented lane.

As she saw him coming she rested her machine against the thick holly hedge, and moved forward to meet him.

Courtney sprang off his own bike, and let it fall to the ground. For both her hands were held out to him, and both his must meet them.

"Have I kept you waiting, Vi?" he asked.

"Oh, no, Arthur! I have only just got here, and you are really before your time. You must have ridden very hard."

"I think I did—yes, I know I did. I was in a hurry to see you again, Vi. But I haven't any good news to give you, I'm sorry to say."

The girl's face quivered, but she looked up bravely.

"You have done your best, I know, Arthur," she said. And her voice rang with utter faith in the lad who held her hands in his.

"Yes, I've done that. But Hawke won't come to terms—to any terms I can make with him. If I had money enough—he's the sort that you could buy anything from at a price—but it's very little I have. And I can't get any from my uncle without explaining why I want it—which is clean impossible in this case."

"It isn't right that you should think of using your own money, or your uncle's, to put straight Rupert's reckless folly," the girl said, gently withdrawing one hand.

But he kept the other. She could not have withdrawn that without force, and she was not sure that she wanted to withdraw it.

"There's nothing I'd grudge doing for him. But it's for your sake, Vi!"

He had never said so much as that before. But she had known it.

It was hardly possible that there should be real friendship between Courtney and Valence. They were too utterly unlike. Most fellows who had suffered for a chum what Courtney had suffered for Valence, and had been repaid by base ingratitude, as he had been, would have washed their hands of that chum once and for all.

Arthur Courtney might not have done that even had Rupert Valence had no sweet, graceful, brown-haired sister. But he did not attempt to disguise from himself that what he did was for Vi's sake; and now the time had come when he could no longer disguise it from her.

"I know. It's a heap to ask of you, and yet I can ask it, Arthur! Not what you went through before—that was too much—though it made me feel ever so proud of you—more proud than I could begin to tell you!"

"Did it, Vi? Then nothing matters! Sometimes I've felt as though the shame of it had burned into my very soul—to be thrashed by a bullying tyrant like old Popper! I've writhed to think of it."

"But you knew that there was no real shame—that to me—"

The girl's voice broke. She could not say what was in her heart. But she stooped suddenly and kissed his hand.

"Vi!"

Courtney spoke hoarsely, almost breathlessly. He looked down at the hand she had now let go like one amazed, and he saw a tear on it.

For a moment they stood speechless. Then the girl pulled herself together, and said:

"You knew all along, Arthur; you must have known! But never mind that; we both understand now. It is Rupert we must talk of. What makes this man Hawke so bitter against him?"

"I don't know; but it's easy to guess. Rupert is inclined to ride the high horse; and Hawke is a spiteful, resentful beast—not the man to stand that sort of thing from anyone he thinks he has in his grip."

"And he has Rupert?"

"I'm afraid so, Vi."

"But I don't quite understand. Of course, I know it must have been through gambling, and very likely Rupert was cheated!"

"Not a doubt of that, I should say!"

"Then how would this man dare to let Dr. Locke know? He would be giving himself away, surely?"

Courtney shook his head gravely.

"It would not be news to the Head if he were told that Hawke is a wrong 'un. He knows that very well. But he can't do much—I'm not sure that he can do anything as far as Hawke is concerned. That wouldn't prevent his dropping heavily on to any fellow who was proved to have had dealings with the scoundrel."

"Won't he wait? Oh, won't he wait? The money must be raised somehow. I have brought all that I can. It isn't nearly enough, I know; but it may help to persuade him to wait."

"In the ordinary way I suppose he would wait—it would be to his advantage if he saw any chance of ever getting paid at all. But Rupert has put his back up badly. Told him that the money was not fairly won—that he couldn't, and wouldn't, pay it—and that if Hawke pressed him further he would bolt and enlist. He is old enough, of course."

The girl's eyes flashed, and involuntarily she squared her shoulders.

"It would be the best thing he could do!" she said. "Rupert means a lot to me—you know that, Arthur! But I'm

not a coward. If I were he, I would go; and if he went I could bear it—even though he never came back! Better dead on the field of honour than disgracing our name—and he is disgracing it!"

"Vi, I've been thinking about that very thing. Why shouldn't we both go—he and I? I'm not sure that he half meant what he said to Hawke; but I do feel sure that he would go with me. We're not the chums we used to be, but—"

"You are ready to sacrifice yourself for him again, Arthur! But it isn't fair! It isn't fair!"

"It wouldn't be sacrificing myself, Vi. I want to go, dear—don't you see? And I'm not the only one. I know how two or three others feel about it. It's all very well to be a member of an Officers' Training Corps, and to know that if the war lasts long enough we shall have commissions. But we'd rather join up at once. The lad from the Council School is old enough at eighteen. Why shouldn't we be?"

"But it's because the people who know all about these things see that you would be more use to the country as officers, isn't it? That's what I've always understood. If your turn comes a little later, your risks are heavier when it does come."

"More use? I'm not sure. Some of us, maybe—fellows like old Wingate, for certain. He was born to lead men. I don't think I was; and I don't think Rupert was. We shouldn't funk whatever might be going, but we're better at following than at giving a lead."

"You don't do yourself justice, Arthur!"

"I think I do, Vi. Don't you think it's a good plan?"

"Does Rupert think it is?"

"I haven't asked him. The fact of the matter is that—well, he won't listen to anything I say just now. He thinks I want to preach to him—Heaven knows I don't! Who am I that I should preach to anyone?"

"And you're going on taking all this trouble for him while he is so basely ungrateful?"

"It's only partly for him. It's mostly for you, Vi. You're a thousand times dearer to me than he is, and there's nothing I wouldn't do for your sake. But if I joined up it wouldn't be just for that. It really seems to me the right thing to do."

The girl's lips quivered.

"If Rupert goes, it must not be under the shadow of disgrace!" she said passionately. "He must not go to avoid expulsion. That is all he seems to be thinking of!"

Courtney could not deny it. There was none of the spirit of self-sacrifice that moved him in Rupert Valence. Like more than one before him, he thought of the Army as a convenient refuge from his creditors.

"I'll have a talk with him, and perhaps if we see Hawke together something may be arranged," said the Sixth-Former.

"I don't know how to thank you enough, Arthur!"

"There's no room for thanks from you to me!" replied Courtney, almost hoarsely. "If it was my life, it wouldn't be too much—for you, dear!"

The light in her eyes as they met his was the light of uttermost trust. But there was more in it than that—as plainly as if it had been told in words Arthur Courtney saw that she loved him as he loved her.

He stooped, and kissed her forehead. But her lips were lifted to his, with the innocence of a child, but the love of a

woman; and for the first time their lips met.

Ting-a-ling-ting!

A bicycle-bell sounded. Vi started back, flushing. Courtney looked round, with anger in his face.

Skinner and Stott and Snoop rode past the two, grinning broadly.

"The confounded young spies!" muttered Courtney furiously.

"I don't think they could have been spying," replied the girl. "It must surely have been an accident."

"You don't know them! I do! I'm sorry, Vi."

"Don't trouble, Arthur. I don't mind—at least, not very much! I'm not ashamed—why should I be? I must go now! Here is the money I brought. Yes, you must take it! I am Rupert's sister, remember. Are you to do all for him, I nothing? And—and— Oh, I don't know how to say it, but I do care, and I trust you with all my heart!"

In another moment she was speeding down the road. Courtney stood looking after her, with a feeling that all life had changed for him.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Three Spies!

"HE, he, he! Didn't I tell you fellows that if we tracked him down we should see something worth seeing?" chortled Harold Skinner.

"Well, we came far enough to see it, and we shall have our work cut out to get back to the school before the dinner-bell goes!" grumbled Stott.

"And we'd better be jolly careful that we don't run into Courtney on the way back!" said Snoop nervously.

"Rats to Courtney! He won't dare to do anything! He'll try to think that we didn't see the jamiest part. Of course, he'll know that we've caught him spooning Valence's sister; but he won't be sure that we saw him kissing her."

"And her kissing him! It was six of one and half a dozen of the other! Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Stott.

"Then we aren't going to say anything about it?" said Snoop. Sidney James had taken alarm at the furious look on the prefect's face.

"Oh, aren't we?" returned Skinner. "What do you think, my tulip? I'm jolly well not going to keep anything like this to myself! Courtney's made me sit up above once. Now it's my turn!"

"Nice yarn for the Common-room!" chimed in Stott. "Let's see whether they'll pull our noses this time!"

"They will," said Snoop gloomily, and with conviction. And, indeed, it seemed likely that Sidney James was right.

"Turn off here," Skinner said. "We can get back another way, and Courtney will have cooled down a bit by after dinner. Though I fancy he may warm up again when the tale gets about."

"Safer to keep dark about it, muttered Snoop.

"Rot! What a chap sees on a public road he may surely talk about?"

"That's all very well, Skinner, but we followed Courtney up—you know we did!"

"I know it all right. But how is anyone else to know it? Easy enough to cook up a yarn about why we were out here."

They had no glimpse of Courtney on the way back until they were within sight of the gates of Greyfriars. Then they saw him wheeling his bike in.

"He didn't scorch so much getting back as he did going!" remarked Skinner, with a grin. "But then, there's only dinner waiting for him this end—and not much of a dinner at that!"

"Much or little, I'm ready for mine!" said Stott. "And there goes the bell!"

At dinner Sidney James Snoop looked distinctly gloomy. He was by long odds the biggest funk in the Remove. Bunter and Fish were no heroes, and there were plenty of things Skinner and Stott feared. But Snoop was worse than any of them, and in this matter he dreaded both Courtney and the Remove.

But Skinner and Stott were quite chippy. They were every bit as spiteful as Snoop, and somewhat less timid, and they detested all the prefects who did their duty.

Before the cold roast beef had given place to pudding there was a considerable amount of tittering going on at the Remove table, and many glances were directed at Courtney, where he sat among the Sixth.

He did not appear to see them. Perhaps he did not see them. But he was under no delusion as to what Skinner & Co. would do. Decency was not to be expected from those young blackguards.

"What's the joke?" growled Johnny Bull.

The story had not yet got to the ears of the Famous Five.

But Squiff had heard.

"It isn't a joke at all," he said. "I like a joke as well as anyone, but this is cads' gossip!"

"He, he, he! I think it's jolly funny myself!" cackled Billy Bunter. "Wish I'd been in Courtney's boots, that's all. I shouldn't have cared who saw me, not a scrap."

"Lucky for you you weren't!" said Peter Todd.

"Oh, really, Toddy! What do you mean?"

"Because any self-respecting girl who had been kissed by you would naturally look round for someone with good big feet to pay you back!"

"He, he, he! I don't consider that kicking is fair payment for kissing!" gurgled the Owl, who seemed vastly amused.

"But any girl who had been kissed by you would," said Peter.

"Well, I haven't got a long nose to get in the way, at any rate. So put that in your pipe and smoke it, Toddy!"

"I have other uses for my nose, thank you, Bunter. And it is true—though you said it—that you haven't a long nose. Your nasal apology is merely a ludicrous and disgusting button!"

"What's that about kissing?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, it wasn't Marjorie, so it's no business of yours, Cherry!"

"I'll give you a hiding after dinner!" growled Bob angrily.

"He, he, he! I suppose it isn't my fault if Courtney—"

"If I hear any more of that absurd cachinnation, Bunter, I shall send you out of the room!" snapped Mr. Quelch, from the head of the table.

Bunter subsided. To be sent out with the second course still in the future was too near tragedy for him.

But Fish took up the tale.

"I say, Wharton, that galoot Skinner says—"

"I don't want to hear what Skinner says!" broke in Harry.

"But he says— Oh, Jerusalem crickets! What are you backing a chap's shins for, Delarey?"

"Sherrup! Quelch's eye's on you!" hissed the South African junior.

Everyone was curious, though some had the decency to veil their curiosity.

After dinner a small crowd gathered around Skinner and Stott. Snoop discreetly vanished.

"Come away, Bob!" said Harry Wharton, taking Bob Cherry by the arm.

"We don't want to listen. Let the cads talk!"

"That's just what I don't mean to let them do if I can help it," replied Bob.

"Hear, hear!" said Johnny Bull. "In my opinion there's a lot too much blather about the rights of free speech. Some chaps need shutting up good and hard!"

"The muzzlefulness would be the good and proper caper," remarked Hurrege Singh. "But I am thinkfully of opinion that it would savour of locking the stable door after the pitcher had gone too often to the well, as your English proverb says."

"Why shouldn't the bounders tell what they saw?" blustered Bolsover major. "You chaps haven't any right to put your ears in. I want to hear, and I want to see."

"You would want to!" said Squiff disdainfully. "You're like any dashed old woman for gossip, Bolsover!"

"Wha-a-a-at? Say that again!" roared the bully of the Remove.

"I say that you're like any dashed old woman for gossip!" repeated the Cornstalk coolly. "Do you want me to write it out? I'm willing."

"He, he, he! Squiff's only trying to draw a red herring across the trail!" sniggered Billy Bunter.

Peter Todd took the Owl by the ear.

"Come away, tubby!" he said. "You haven't any morals, so they can't be corrupted. But you're too inflammable, and I'm going to see—"

"Yaroooh! Lemme be, Toddy! I've as good a right to hear about Courtney's kissing Valence's sister as—"

"What's that?"

It was Rupert Valence's voice that broke in with a bellow like that of an angry bull.

The tall senior strode in among them, hurling Russell one way and Kipps another, and yanked Bunter out of Toddy's grasp.

His face was like the face of a wrathful demon, but most of those who saw could make excuses for him. It was not a pleasant thing for a fellow to hear at best, and hearing it from Bunter, who spoke of it with gloating, did not make it more pleasant.

Valence shook Bunter savagely. The fat junior quivered like a jelly in his angry grip.

"Say it again, if you dare! Say it again, and I'll throttle you!" hissed the Sixth-Former.

"I should advise him not to say it again at that price!" remarked Delarey.

"Steady on, Valence! Bunter was only repeating what he had heard from other cads," said Wharton.

"Eh? Who dares to say— Ah, is it you, Skinner?"

Skinner was struggling in the hold of Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull. He had decided that absence of body was the best presence of mind at this juncture, but Bob and Johnny had no notion of letting him slink away.

Frank Nugent and Tom Brown had collared Stott, but Stott did not struggle. He thought it better not to draw attention upon himself.

"I—I—"

"Skinner doesn't seem quite so ready to tell his tale now as he was a little while ago!" sneered Vernon-Smith.

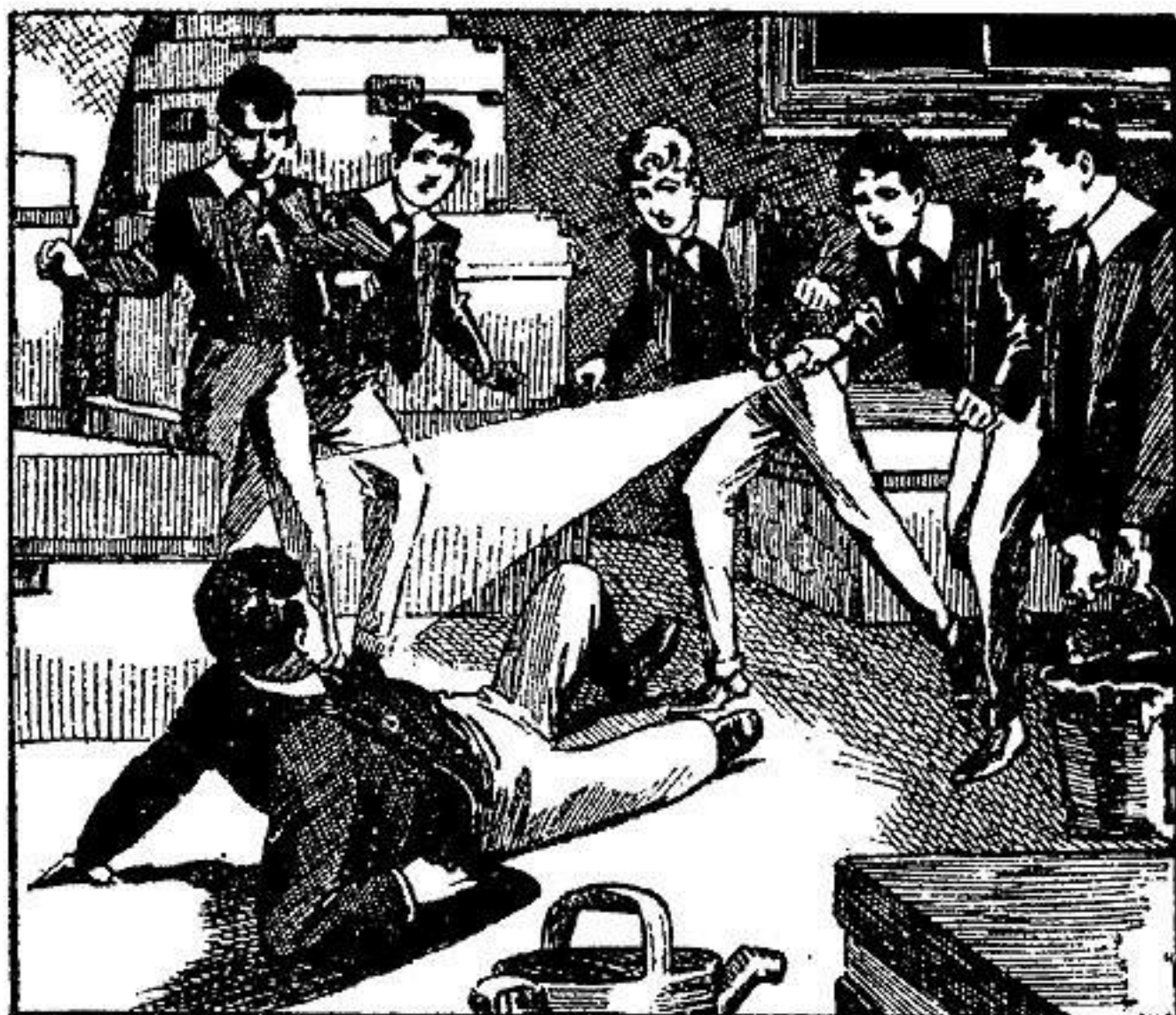
"Hand him over!" thundered Valence.

"Look here, Valence, hadn't you better wait till you're a bit cooler?"

"None of your cheek, Wharton! I'll thank you to mind your own business!"

"It's not my fault, Valence," muttered Skinner, in real terror. "We couldn't help seeing it, you know. If you don't like it, you ought to get at Courtney about it, not at us."

"If I don't like it! Oh, you rotten



Not the fellow they expected! (See Chapter 6.)

young cad! As if any fellow— But it's no good talking to you. Who was with you?"

"Stott and Snoop," replied Skinner, in trembling tones.

"So Snoop was there!" murmured Bulstrode. "Just as well to know that!"

"Is this true, Stott?" roared Valence.

"I don't want to say anything about it," answered Stott sullenly.

"Rather a pity that you didn't come to that frame of mind an hour earlier!" said Delarey.

"A pity someone didn't cut all the rotters' tattlin' tongues out, begad!" said Mauleverer.

"Where's Snoop?" demanded Valence.

But no one knew where Snoop was—except Sidney James himself. As a matter of fact, he had gone to earth in a box-room.

"Where was it?" was Valence's next question.

He seemed determined to know all about it. Some who heard thought that, in his place, they would have considered the less said the better.

But Valence did not appear to be of that mind. He was too furious to be discreet.

"In Welswick Lane," replied Skinner, "and that's all I mean to say. You can't get at me—"

"And you needn't, Valence," said Squiff. "You can leave him to us. The Remove doesn't exactly love spies, you know."

"Who says we were spying?" hooted Skinner.

"It's a lie, whoever says it!" mumbled Stott.

"Of course it is!" said the Bounder sarcastically. "Skinner, Stott, and Snoop, by gad! Could anyone in his senses believe for a moment that three such high-minded youths could be spying?"

"A chap isn't to be condemned because other fellows no better than he is take it for granted he's guilty," said Skinner, with an ugly look at the Bounder. "I defy anyone to prove that we followed Courtney."

Clavering stepped forward.

"I don't care about telling tales," he said, flushing, "but I know you did. I wouldn't say anything, only I think the three of you are about the dirtiest set of skunks I ever struck, and it's up to me to speak!"

Valence had released Skinner now. He looked round at the faces of the crowd.

Skinner & Co. seemed to have no friends there. Even Bolsover major was against them. Bolsover was not a specially high-minded youth, but he drew the line somewhere.

"I'll leave the young cads to you fellows," said Valence, with a very unpleasant smile. "I've Courtney to talk to. Don't let them off too easily, that's all!"

He strode away. Possibly he had exaggerated the sympathy felt for him in the Remove. That Form's sympathy was almost entirely with Courtney, who was a general favourite, whereas few liked Valence. The Remove did not mind Courtney's kissing Valence's sister, and saw no particular reason why Valence's sister should mind, though they could quite understand that having it talked about was not nice for Valence.

What the Remove objected to was spying and tattling. It was less the telling of the story by Skinner & Co. than the manner in which it was told and the way in which it had been got hold of that angered every fellow there with a sense of decency.

"Well, Clavering?" said Wharton.

"I was in my study just after classes this morning, taking a book down from the shelf behind the door, when I heard Snoop's footstep in the passage," answered the new boy. "He had just got to the door when Stott hurried up and said: 'Come along, Snoop! Skinner says the Bounder has just started!'"

"I never said anything of the sort, you lying cad!" howled Stott.

"You've forgotten, Stott," said Skinner. "Didn't I ask you to hunt up Snoop and tell him to come along to my study for a game because the Bounder had just gone out?"

He told his lie with perfect coolness.

And Stott, recovering himself, backed him up at once.

"So you did!" he said. "But what's that to do with Courtney?"

Some of those who heard were half persuaded, although they knew well how little Harold Skinner cared for the truth at any time.

But Vernon-Smith spoiled the effect produced.

"Where had I started for, Skinner?" he asked.

"I don't know. How should I? I only know I saw you go," replied the cad of the Remove, shrugging his shoulders.

"Well, I'm not a George Washington!" said the Bounder sardonically. "I've told a good many lies, and I dare say I shall tell a good many more. So it comes to a choice between me and Skinner, both of us being quite capable at a pinch of saying that which is not. In this particular instance, though, I haven't anything to gain by lying, and Skinner has."

"Then you weren't out, Smithy? I know you wouldn't come with us to footer practice," said Harry Wharton.

"I went to my study directly after classes. I came up the stairs just behind Clavering. And I didn't stir from the place till dinner," replied the Bounder. "If Skinner & Co. had their little game there they must have donned mantles of invisibility. And it must have been a very short game to leave them time to get to Welwick Lane and back again!"

"That's good enough!" growled Johnny Bull.

"No time to attend to the rotters before classes," Bob Cherry said. "If we look out when it comes to the dismiss we can collar Snoop, too."

"I don't see what we've done that you chaps should make all this fuss about it!" whined Stott.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

A Row in the Sixth!

RUPERT VALENCE did not see Courtney again till both entered the Sixth Form-room that afternoon.

Their seats were not together, and in the presence of the Head Valence had no chance to say anything until classes were over.

As they came out, however, Courtney felt a strong and not too friendly grip upon his arm.

"I want a word with you," spoke Valence's voice in his ear.

Two hours of thinking over things—for he had done precious little work—had not cooled Rupert Valence down. In fact, he was more savage than ever.

There were many reasons why he should feel grateful to Courtney. But gratitude is not a plant which thrives in any soil. Valence had little of it. For months past—though until lately he had been going slow after his expulsion and subsequent reinstatement—he had kept aloof from his chum of former days.

"All right!" replied Courtney, in rather a troubled voice. "I'll come along to your study if you like."

They went. And all the way Valence kept his grip on the other senior's arm. There was savagery in that grip. Courtney knew what it meant. But he was not ashamed of anything he had done, and he certainly had no reason to fear Valence. The situation had been made an awkward one by the three spies. But, in any case, Courtney had meant to have a talk with Valence, and he had not expected that talk to be entirely pleasant.

Valence closed the door and turned the key in the lock when once they were inside the study. He had to release Courtney's arm to do that; but as he turned again his hand went up as if he meant to take the other senior by the throat.

"Keep your temper!" said Courtney sharply. "I don't want to quarrel with you, Rupert, but there's a limit."

"There is, and you've gone past it, by gad!"

"Will you let me explain?" asked Courtney quietly.

"I don't see what possible explanation you can give. Of course, it's all very well for you. No one thinks the worse of a fellow for kissing a good-looking girl. But what about the girl? Nice for her to have her name bandied about by every fellow at Greyfriars, isn't it? Vi ought to be—"

"Not a word against Vi! I can stand anything from you but that, Rupert. Don't you understand? We're not children, Vi and I. We're young yet, I know; but she's the only girl in the world for me, and that won't change, however long—or short—my life may be. And now I know that she cares for me as something more than a friend—we've always been good friends, Vi and I!"

Something of the fury went out of Valence's face. He was no child, either; and he recognised the manhood that spoke in Courtney.

"That's all very well," he said. "I don't know what my people will say to it. I don't know that I'm keen on it myself. But I admit it makes some difference. What I bar is your meeting her on the sly, and being seen by those young rotters. We can't explain to the whole school that—oh, that it's the dead straight thing, and not mere spooning!"

"I'm as angry about that as you can be. And if I find out that it was not by accident they came along—"

"It wasn't!" struck in Valence grimly.

"But those young cads don't matter. Wharton and the rest have undertaken to attend to them, and I fancy they're to be depended upon. It's too late to scotch the yarn; but Skinner and the rest won't be in too big a hurry to dog you again, I should say."

"Yes, we can depend upon Wharton," said Courtney. "There's one thing that must be put straight between you and me, though, Rupert. You talk of my meeting Vi on the sly. That's not fair, to her or to me—not that I matter much."

"You can't get out of it. You don't mean to pretend that my people knew of it, do you?"

"No, I don't. But do they know all that Vi knows—about you, I mean?"

The question staggered Valence. His eyes gleamed luridly, and a spot of red flamed in each of his cheeks as he sneered:

"So you're mixing yourself up in my affairs again?"

"You may call it that if you like," answered Courtney quietly. "But what could I do? You appealed to Vi for help, without any thought of the grief it would cause her to know that you were in such a hole."

"I shall be in a dashed sight worse hole if I don't get help!" snarled Valence. "As you know so much you must be aware of that. But I don't thank Vi for telling you!"

"Whom could she tell but me? Where else could she look for help, as you refused to make a clean breast of it at home?"

"You know as well as I do that that would be no use, so don't let's have any dashed cant about making a clean breast of it! That's the worst of you pious chaps. You can't look at things from a

man-of-the-world point of view. Your notion is that when a chap's kicked over the traces he wants to confess and repent. Well, that's where you're off it! What he wants is to get out of the rotten hole he's got into without any confessing and repenting. They're the very things he bars most—see?"

"I see, Rupert! I've no claim to be considered pious, and you know it, and I haven't any notion of preaching to you. I don't ask you to do penance or to call yourself a miserable sinner; but I do think it's a manlier and straighter course to face anger at home rather than drag your sister into it, and ask her to help you out."

"Rot! I haven't dragged Vi into it! I only asked her to let me have all the cash she could scrape together, and you needn't think that trifle is going to get me out of the hole! But it would help to stave the worst off for a bit. Then she's so blessed inquisitive—"

"Hang it all, Rupert, only a mean mind could put it that way!"

Valence winced, recognising the justice of the rebuke, perhaps.

"Well, put it how you will, I had to explain things to her a bit. I didn't want her to pass on the whole yarn to you, though."

"Don't you think you should have come to me first?" asked Courtney.

"No. Why should I?"

"We were good chums in the old days, Rupert. It's not my fault that we are no longer so."

"Your fault? Oh, no! You're one of the faultless sort, Courtney. No one ought ever to think of blaming you for anything. But, though I'm no saint, I've my pride. And, though you're so generous and forgiving, I know dashed well you must have hated the sight of me ever since the Popper affair. If I'd been in your place I think I'd have lain for the old hunks with a gun, and turned it afterwards on the cad who let me in for enduring his brutality!"

There was bitter self-scorn in Valence's voice; but there was something less worthy, too. He had gone near to hate himself for that episode of the past, but he had gone near to hating Courtney also. His pride was of the kind that could not bear to contemplate the contrast between them.

"It isn't true, Rupert! On my honour, it's not! I won't say I had no feeling against you; but that soon passed. What has kept us apart since has been your feeling, not mine."

"Well, let it go at that," said Valence sullenly. "The fact remains that we aren't chums, and never shall be again. And you've no more right to butt into my troubles than Wingate or North or Hammersley."

"I think I have. Anyway, my right begins when you drag Vi into them."

"Oh, dash it all, you're not married to the girl—yet!"

Courtney flushed at the coarse insolence of that speech. But still he kept his temper, though not easily.

"Look here, Rupert! You told Hawke that if he didn't act like a reasonable person you'd cut the whole thing and enlist! Did you mean that?"

"How in the world did you come to know what I told Hawke?"

"Never mind that, old man. See here, the thing can't be done the way you suggested. It wouldn't be decent. But if we can bring the rascal to terms between us, why shouldn't we leave here and enlist together? We're big and old and strong enough to take our places in the ranks. And you might find out there that—that it's possible for us to be chums still, in spite of all that has passed!"

Arthur Courtney spoke with real

enthusiasm, and in a better mood Valence might have responded.

But it was evident at once that he would not respond. His lip curled in a sneer as he said:

"You've fixed that nice little scheme up with Vi, of course? Just like the romantic notions of a silly girl and a fellow who's ass enough to think he's anchored himself for life at eighteen! You'd never make a soldier, Courtney! There's only one job for you—a parson's!"

"I can stand your insults, Valence; but I'm fed up with your rotten sneers at your sister, who is worth ten thousand of you!"

"In your eyes, I dare say. But never mind Vi. She hasn't much to do with this affair, and she'll have precious little to do with you in future, if I have my way! How did you know that I spoke to Hawke of joining the Army?"

"The fellow told me so himself."

"What?"

"He told me so himself. I think I spoke plainly, Valence!"

"You mean to say that you've been to him?" gasped Valence, almost choking with rage.

"It was my duty to go, I consider."

"Your duty—to me? Pah! What is there between us that you should owe any duty to me?"

"Not to you. To Vi."

"Keep Vi out of this, or——"

"I wish I could! it's through you that she has been dragged into it—through your weak cowardice!"

Arthur Courtney had warmed up now. His patience was at an end.

He might have been wrong in approaching Hawke, but he felt that Valence had been far more utterly wrong in his selfish appeal to Vi.

"Call me a coward, do you? Take that!"

Rupert Valence's fist shot out.

In spite of the warning words, Courtney was not prepared for a blow. The blow was, in fact, delivered even as the words were spoken.

It took Courtney right under the chin, and he crashed backwards, his head striking the fender.

For a moment he lay there, unable to rise, half insensible.

Valence did not offer him a hand. He stood glaring down at him.

Courtney staggered to his feet with difficulty.

"Put your hands up!" he said hoarsely. "That was a foul blow!"

"Stop! You're bleeding, man!" gasped Valence, taken aback now.

The other senior put up his hand to his head. It came away with blood upon it. He stood a second or two, staring at it in a half-dazed way.

"I'm sorry!" said Valence awkwardly. "I never meant to do that! But you goaded me to it!"

"Put your hands up again!" said Courtney doggedly.

"I tell you you're not fit, man!"

"That's my look-out. Put your hands up, or take a thrashing!"

"If you will have it, then——" howled Valence, and he sprang at Courtney like a tiger.

He was surprised at the reception he met. Courtney was hurt and shaken, but he still carried too many guns for Valence. Only George Wingate knew just how good Courtney was; he knew what that straight right-hand punch of his meant. They often boxed together, but Courtney seldom put on the gloves with anyone else.

Valence took that right-hand punch now, and it sent him sprawling on the table, feeling sick and giddy. But he came on again, only to stagger back once more, spinning round till the wall stopped him.

"I say, what's the row in here?" sounded Wingate's voice from outside.

"No concern of yours!" panted Valence savagely.

"You're there, Courtney, I know. What's up? You can't fight in there like two fags, you know."

"He's right, Valence. There's been enough of it," said Courtney.

He strode over to the door. Valence gave a half-intelligible growl of protest, but did not strive to stop him.

"Arthur! Why, you're bleeding, old chap!" said Wingate, closing the door behind him as he entered.

"It's of no consequence," Courtney answered. "My head struck something, that's all."

Wingate looked gravely at Valence's bruised and savage face.

"I need hardly ask who started it," he said. "Courtney's no brawler."

"Oh, Courtney's not guilty, of course!" sneered Valence. "At least, he's only guilty of getting my sister talked about all over Greyfriars! That's nothing! If it had been a sister of yours, Wingate, the fat would have been in the fire. But I ought to think it a dashed honour, I suppose? Well, I don't; and I warn Courtney here and now that I'll make him sorry for himself if he interferes in my affairs again! As for my sister, he shall never set eyes on her in future if I can help it!"

Courtney staggered, and his face turned deathly pale. The out on his head was a more severe one than he had realised.

"Come along, old fellow!" said Wingate very gently, and he took his chum by the arm as he spoke. "I don't want to inquire into the rights and wrongs of things, for I'm certain that you're not the man to do anything shameful."

Courtney went, walking with difficulty, for his head swam.

Valence dropped into a chair, his face in his hands. He was ashamed of himself; he was half crazy with fear; yet he was not repentant. His was one of those stubborn natures to which nothing short of tragedy brings real repentance.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Missing!

WHERE'S Skinner?"

The stentorian voice of Bob Cherry boomed along the passage.

But the question which Bob asked was not one that could be answered by any who heard.

Somehow or other Skinner and Stott and Snoop—when Bob Cherry inquired for Skinner he meant all three—had slipped out of the Remove Form-room ahead of the rest, and had vanished. They could not have vanished into thin space. As Delarey remarked, that was too much to hope for, as it would mean that they were not expected to return. But they appeared to have gone out of gates, as Tom Brown, always practical, reported their bikes absent from the shed.

They stole in just before tea, took that meal in Hall, and vanished again. But they might have spared themselves the trouble on this occasion. For it had been resolved to give them a Form trial in dormitory.

If Courtney had been a less popular fellow nothing much would have been said. Certainly the Remove would not have troubled about a Form trial if Skinner & Co. had reported seeing Loder or Carne or Valence spooning. But it was another matter when Courtney was concerned, and the Famous Five and some of the other fellows who happened

to know Violent Valence were honestly indignant.

Before bed-time the story of the fight between Courtney and Valence was going the rounds.

Loder had started it, though it might have been difficult to bring home to him the charge of having done so. Wingate had said no word to anyone, not even to Gwynne, who was his chum, and Courtney's, too; and naturally Valence and Courtney had not talked. But Gerald Loder, who had heard the sounds of the combat, and had peeped out of his door to see Courtney led away, bleeding and half-dazed, by Wingate, was not the fellow to keep dark such a choice bit of scandal as a fight with bare fists between two fellows of his own Form.

Valence had had the best of it, so it was said. But the sympathies of the great majority were with Courtney, whether victor or victim.

"Courtney's not the spooning sort," said Harry Wharton. "The yarn those cads tell may be true. I dare say it is. In a way it's not news. We all knew he was fond of Valence's sister. And he isn't a kid. He means it. Valence is an ass to quarrel with him, and a bigger ass to go round raging about it."

"You speak like an oracle, Wharton!" said Squiff.

"Like a sensible chap!" growled Johnny Bull. "I've no use for spoony asses. But Courtney's all right. I know that."

"Now, I wonder," said Frank Nugent, "whether Courtney's going to the Cross Keys had anything to do with Valence?"

"Might have had, too," said Bob Cherry, opening his eyes widely. "Old Courtney stood by that rotter before in a way that no other fellow ever born would have done, and he might be doing it again."

"Valence's particular vanity ain't puthaunting so much as poaching," remarked Squiff thoughtfully. "But he's quite enough of an all-round rotter for that to be poss. If I were Courtney, I'd let him sink or swim by himself this time, though."

"It's because of his sister, if he's doing it," said Wharton.

Nobody answered that. If anyone there understood how Courtney felt, Harry Wharton might be expected to. He had done much and borne much for Peter Hazeldene, and all that he had done and borne had been for the sake of Hazel's sister.

Skinner & Co. did not enjoy the hour of prep. Clavering had not a word to say to Stott and Snoop; but the Bouncer talked to Skinner. It was not talk that Skinner appreciated, for it was chiefly about the things that were going to happen to him and his fellow-spies when they went up to bed.

They were in something like a state of panic by that time. During the interval between prep and bed-time they had taken shelter in the box-room. Billy Bunter, nosing round, had found them there, and had virtuously reported his find to the Famous Five. The reward of virtue in this particular instance was a bumping. Bunter thought it most unfair.

Nobody spoke to the three when they slunk into the dormitory. But Bolsover major scowled at them, and Vernon-Smith grinned sardonically. Even fellows like Trevor and Treluce and Elliott, generally to be found on the wrong side when they declared themselves at all, had not a word to say for the spies.

Skinner and Stott and Snoop could not understand it. They had done far worse things—from their point of view—without incurring the general condemnation of the Form to anything like this extent.

North came along to put out lights. After he had gone there was a brief interval of silence in the dormitory. It was best not to be in too big a hurry at such times. A perfect might blow in again.

But in about ten minutes the Bounder said sharply:

"Time you came up to the scratch, Skinner! Shin out!"

There was no reply.

The Bounder himself got out of bed. He flashed an electric torch upon Skinner's bed.

Skinner's bed was empty!

"Stott's done a bunk!" said Ogilvy at the same moment.

"So has Snoop!" announced Squiff.

No one had heard the three go. They must have been very cautious and silent. And they had wasted no time.

"Looks almost as if they didn't want to be tried," said Delarey.

"It doesn't matter much what they want," said Johnny Bull. "They may put it off a little, but they've got to go through it."

"We shall have to find them first, though," Peter Todd said.

That could not be denied.

"Wonder whether they've done a bunk?" said Hazeldene.

"Not likely! They haven't the pluck!" answered Dick Russell scornfully.

"I don't think running away is very plucky," said Harry Wharton, as he thrust his legs through his trousers.

"Not so sure!" said Hazel moodily.

Wharton was not the only one who was dressing. At least a dozen were also donning the garments so lately doffed. If the trio who were wanted meant to elude search they would have to find some new hiding-place, for the search was bound to be thorough.

The box-room was tried first, and drawn blank. Vernon-Smith, Squiff, and Delarey went down to the study floor, while the Famous Five, Tom Brown, Peter Todd, and Mark Linley made further investigations above. Bolsover major, struck by a bright idea—an unusual occurrence with him—insisted on going down to the Form-rooms, and Ogilvy and Russell went with him.

The three were not in the studies. They were not, as far as search could make certain, on the dormitory floor.

But Bolsover's notion turned out to have something in it.

"Where's the other rotter?" demanded Percy Bolsover roughly.

"We don't know anything about him," replied Stott. "Look here! Just you leave us alone, Bolsover! If we sing out you'll get in the merry dickens of a row!"

"Who cares? We don't!" growled the bully of the Remove. "Not so sure about you two. You're funks. Look slippy, now! If you don't go on your feet we'll carry you!"

Snoop and Stott went meekly. By the time they and their captors reached the Remove dormitory the rest of the searchers had returned—without Skinner.

"Now, just you worms tell us where Skinner's hidden himself, or we'll make it hot for you!" said Bolsover threateningly.

Bolsover always enjoyed anything of this sort. It gave him a fair excuse for the methods of hectoring that suited him. Whether he was quite as indignant as some of the other avengers at the crime of which the spies had been guilty was a doubtful point. And whether he particularly wanted Skinner to be found was another. Bolsover did remember now and then that once on a time Skinner

had done something for which he had cause to feel grateful.

"I— Oh, look here! I'll tell you if you let me off!" burred Snoop.

"Shut up, you sneak!" said Stott savagely.

"Funk! Oh, you funk, Snoop!" hooted Billy Bunter.

"I don't care what you call me. It wasn't really my fault that I was in this affair at all," said Snoop sullenly. "I didn't want to be, and I told Skinner that it would be best to keep it dark."

"You can say all that when it comes to the trial," Bob Cherry said impatiently. "The question you've got to answer now is, where's Skinner?"

"I believe he's run away!"

"Don't take any notice of him. I don't believe anything of the sort!" said Stott.

"Well, that's what he said he was going to do. You know he did, Stott!"

"Yes. That's one reason why I don't believe it. Skinney ain't the best hand at telling the truth that I know."

"Well, he's gone out. I know that much," Snoop persisted.

"How did he go?" asked Johnny Bull.

"By the box-room window, I suppose."

"He didn't, then! We were in there only a few minutes ago, and the window was fastened."



"Perhaps one of these two shut it after him," suggested Kipps.

"We didn't. But he's gone. I expect he's slipped out since you were there," Snoop said. "I know he was going to his study first to get some of his things."

"Oh, shut up!" snarled Stott. "You know jolly well you don't believe a word of all that, if he did say so!"

"But did he say so?" asked Frank Nugent.

"I'm not going to tell you anything," answered Stott stubbornly.

"I'll trot along to the box-room and see," volunteered Bob Cherry.

He came back in a minute or two.

"Seems as if there's something in it," he said. "Someone's gone out since we were there. The window's unlatched now!"

"Three, muffled cheers!" said the Bounder. "Cheer in a whisper, you chaps! Skinner's done a bunk! Nothing better ever happened for Greyfriars!"

"Oh, he'll come back!" growled Johnny Bull. "I suppose we can't very well go on with the trial of these two rotters without him?"

"I don't see how," replied Wharton. "Skinner was leader, that's pretty certain, as Stott and Snoop were the others concerned. But my notion is that he'll slink back as soon as he thinks we are asleep. He may be hiding in the woodshed now. I vote that some of us go and wait for him in the box-room!"

"Good notion!" said the Bounder. "Meanwhile, these two can sit on the floor and wait, too."

"Oh, let the sweeps get back to bed!" Wharton said. "No, don't you come, Smithy! You aren't too fit yet. Bob—"

"We five will go," said Johnny Bull decidedly.

And it was the Famous Five who went to watch for Skinner's return. Inky made no objection, in spite of the cold; and none of the others thought of the cold at all.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Not Skinner, After All!

ARTHUR COURTNEY had told Wingate that he would rather be alone, and the skipper had left him in his own study, after sponging and strapping the wound at the back of his head.

George Wingate's hands did their work very gently and very deftly, and he did not ask a single question. He was a real chum, Courtney felt.

But Wingate did not go without learning more of the trouble.

"I suppose you've heard the yarn that's going round?" Courtney asked.

"Yes. But don't tell me anything unless you choose, old man!"

"I'd rather. You will understand, anyway. Skinner and Stott and Snoop came upon me with Violet Valence—they'd dogged me, I'm pretty certain, though I can't think why. You know how things are with me, Win. But we didn't meet because of that—I mean, I hadn't asked her to meet me on the sly. It was something else."

"Oh, I know! That idiot Valence has been getting into trouble again. Whispers about it have come to me. Loder doesn't exactly love Valence, though they are birds of a feather, and Loder has a poisonous tongue."

"Don't think of Valence as Loder's sort, George! He isn't that."

"He's not worth the trouble you take over him, Arthur! Let him scramble out of the hole himself, if he can! If he can't, and comes a mucker, I sha'n't pity him. He cares nothing about the good name of the school. Let him rip!"

"But there's Vil!"

"Yes, I know that. Pity such a topping girl ever had such a rotter of a brother, I say! But it does make a difference, I admit. You really care for the girl, old man?"

"Can you doubt it? I care more for her than for all the rest of the world, Win!"

"Then there's no more to be said, I know. You think it's up to you, and I'm not denying it. Is there any way I can help? I wouldn't stir a finger for Valence, but I'd do my best for his sister. And there's nothing I wouldn't do for you, Arthur!"

It was not George Wingate's way to express his feelings so plainly as that. His rugged face reddened as he spoke. But later he was glad—very glad in the midst of a great sorrow—that he had spoken those words. Courtney might have understood without them, for so loyal and generous a friend as he always knows what friendship means. Yet it was well they should have been said.

"I'll ask you if there is anything, old chap. But I don't see how you could help now," said Courtney. "Valence resents my interference, and he would be madder than ever if he thought I had talked him over with you."

"Right-ho! Only come to me if there's anything to be done. And don't trouble about Valence's feelings, or expect any gratitude from him for anything you do. You won't get it!"

With that Wingate went, and Courtney sat by the fire alone, thinking—thinking hard.

For all the trouble he had faced, and must yet face, his thoughts were not wholly sad.

How could that be while Vi Valence's fair face floated before his mental vision?

That day had marked an epoch in Arthur Courtney's life. He felt as though Greyfriars and schooldays belonged to the past. And he hoped yet to be able to carry out the plan he had talked over with Vi—hoped that he and her brother might yet come to real, enduring friendship, where friendship counts for so much. Over there, where manhood is proven, Rupert Valence might yet wipe out the stains upon him, and prove himself a man.

Somebody tapped at the door.

"Come in!" said Courtney.

It was Nugent minor who appeared, looking very serious. It was not the usual way of the volatile Dicky to look serious. But the Second generally, though despising anything in the nature of spooning, were for Courtney. And Dicky felt just then that a grin would have been out of place.

"Note for you, Courtney!" he said.

He thrust a none too clean envelope into the prefect's hands.

"A loafer brought it," said Dicky. "Gatty and Myers and me—I, I mean—were at the gates. One of those chaps who hang round the Cross Keys, he was. I told Gatty and Myers not to say a word to a blessed soul. They won't split, Courtney."

"Thanks, kid! But don't you go thinking that I want you—"

"Oh, I know, Courtney! You ain't that sort. Look here, you know, it's all very well—Valence's sister is a jolly nice girl—but—"

"That's enough, young Nugent!"

There was more than a suspicion of snap in Courtney's tone, but Dicky did not resent it.

"I suppose I oughtn't to have said anything about the girl," he told himself as he went downstairs. "Chaps are no end touchy when they're in love. Shouldn't wonder if I might be myself. But she really is a spiffing girl, though she has a cad of a brother. Hope old Courtney won't get mixed up with that Cross Keys gang through him. He's jolly innocent for a chap of his age, and they'd do him down, for a cert. He'd think it cheek if I offered him a bit of advice. But I bet I know more about that sort of thing than he does, though I ain't particularly proud of it."

Courtney opened the dirty note as soon as Nugent minor had gone.

It was from Jerry Hawke, as he expected; and, in spite of Dicky's notions about his innocence, Courtney was shrewd enough to guess that the blackguard had been making inquiries about him, and had come to the conclusion that it was worth while being civil.

He had not been at all civil at their earlier interview. But it was likely enough that he had learned since then that Courtney's uncle was a rich man, and that Courtney was his heir. Lots of people knew that, and fellows of Hawke's type had their own ways of finding out such things.

Hawke addressed him as "Deer Mr. Cortney," and asked for another interview. He suggested half-past ten as a suitable time, and the Cross Keys as a suitable place.

Courtney liked neither time nor place. But he had no hesitation as to what he should do.

He must go, of course. If anything could be done for Rupert Valence, it must be done—for Vi's sake?

He saw no one and spoke to no one during the rest of the evening. When he was starting out he found that he had mislaid or lost the key to the small side-



"Good-bye!" (See Chapter 10.)

gate. Each of the prefects had one of these keys, but it was very seldom Courtney used his.

It did not matter much, he thought. He could easily get out by the box-room window and the leads—the way known to him of old, as a junior.

By that way he went, not quite liking it, but preferring it to asking the loan of a key from any of his colleagues.

From a door close to that of his study Harold Skinner watched him go. The fact that the prefect had on coat and cap showed the crafty Removeite that he was likely to be away some time. And that just suited Skinner.

The cad of the Remove had never had the least intention of running away. He had told Stott and Snoop that the one way to get the dormitory trial postponed was for one or more of them to be searched for in vain. They could not all hide successfully, he said; but one of them could manage it all right, and that would serve the purpose of the others.

To Snoop he said something about running away, guessing that Snoop would let it out. Stott's loyalty was not a very certain quantity; but there was nothing doubtful about the loyalty of Sidney James Snoop. He did not know the meaning of the word!

Skinner had stolen down to the Sixth Form passage, while his cronies had gone elsewhere. Carne's study was empty, its occupant being with Loder and Walker. There Skinner had hidden himself.

But it was no very secure refuge. Carne might return at any moment. So Skinner was glad to shift his quarters to Courtney's study.

He wrapped himself up in an old overcoat of the prefect's, and put himself to bed under the table. The fire was burning quite nicely, and the fact that the floor was harder than his bed in the Remove dormitory did not trouble Skin-

ner. If he were there he would not be in bed, and he did not mean to return there until there was a fair chance that everyone should be asleep.

What—if anything—happened to Stott and Snoop in the meantime was not his concern.

Skinner fell asleep in a very few minutes. The sleep of the just is merely a phrase; the unjust often sleep quite as well.

Courtney had gone on his unpleasant mission. The Famous Five waited in the box-room for the return of Skinner, who had not gone out. And the three who were to be tried for spying all slept—Snoop and Stott in their beds; Skinner, as soundly as they, under the table in Arthur Courtney's study.

"We might just as well have waited in the dorm," said Frank Nugent, shivering.

"I am thinkfully of the opinion of my honourable chum," purred Hurree Singh, doing likewise.

"Well, we should have dozed off there," said Johnny Bull.

"There ain't any blessed chance of doing that here!" said Bob. "I say, Inky, you'd better cut back to bed. And Frank, too. We shall have you both laid up, and a nice sort of thing that will be!"

"If you can stand it, I suppose I can, Bob!" answered Frank irritably.

"Not so sure, my tulip! Hallo, hallo, hallo! Someone's coming! Got your electric torch ready, Harry?"

Someone was coming. Against the darkness of the window something yet darker showed, blotting out the faint starlight.

They had kept a longish vigil, but it was over at last. Not one of the five had any doubt that in another minute or so

the elusive Skinner would be in their grip.

So they stood silent in the darkness while the window-sash was pushed up, and the fellow outside dropped in.

Then they made a rush for him. He gave a short, sharp sound of surprise, caught his foot in something, and fell.

The light of the electric torch flashed. "My hat! It's Courtney!" cried Wharton.

The rest fairly staggered in surprise. Wharton gave Courtney a hand to help him rise.

"What are you juniors doing here?" asked the prefect.

Had it been Loder or Carne, Walker or Valence, there would have been a ready and quite easy retort. A question of that sort hardly came well from a fellow who had quite obviously been out on some secret errand.

But it was Courtney!

That made all the difference. They believed in Courtney. The story of his having been seen coming out of the Cross Keys had not shaken their faith. And this did not shake it. No higher testimony than that to the life Arthur Courtney had led at Greyfriars could have been asked for.

They had never known him anything but straight and generous, and they were not going to believe him anything else now.

So they stood before him almost tongue-tied, for he had still the prefect's authority over them.

It was Wharton who spoke. "We were looking for a fellow in our Form," he said. And in his eyes there was a mute appeal to Courtney not to ask for the fellow's name.

Harry never knew whether Courtney understood it. All that was sure was that he did not ask.

"Get back to bed!" he said sharply. He did not explain by as much as a word his own position.

They went. Courtney accompanied them along the passage, but did not even turn his head when they filed in at the dormitory door.

"It's queer! He's like a fellow who's had such a shock that nothing coming after it matters," whispered Frank to Harry.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

What Skinner Heard!

FRANK NUGENT was right! Courtney had had a shock—an awful shock.

He had known that Rupert Valence was not straight, but he had never suspected anything quite as black as this.

The whole world had seemed to be reeling when he learned the truth from Jerry Hawke.

Rupert Valence a forger! It would break Vi's heart, he felt.

Yet it was true. Courtney had plenty of shrewdness, though he lacked experience in the ways of rascaldom. He would not have accepted that story on Hawke's bare word.

There was evidence enough. He had seen the cheque. Nothing could be more certain than that it had never been drawn by Mr. Valence. As Courtney was well aware, Valence had been ready to do anything rather than have the people at home know of the hole into which he had fallen.

And Hawke had never believed it anything but a forgery. Not for a moment had he been deceived.

Little wonder that Valence had resented Courtney's interference!

He could deceive Vi, who knew so

little about such things; he could play upon her affection. But he knew that Arthur Courtney's clear sight was not to be thus deceived. If Courtney was suffered to know anything, he would soon know everything, and because of that he must not be allowed to help.

What was to be done? Hawke's demands were such as could not be met. Vi's pittance, all that Courtney himself could raise by the aid of Wingate and other chums, would weigh but lightly in the balance.

Courtney never gave another thought to the Famous Five after they were once out of his sight.

More than ever he felt now that the end of his long, good time at Greyfriars had come. It had been a good time, and as dearly as ever he loved the old school. He would suffer much rather than disgrace should fall upon it. But even for Greyfriars he did not care as he cared for Vi.

"I must see him! I can't go to bed leaving it like this!" he muttered, pacing up and down his study.

Either his muttering or his footsteps awoke Skinner. But Skinner lay quite still under the table.

"Something jolly serious is up!" he told himself. "I don't know that I want to hear about it, but it looks as if I should have to. And, after all, you never know what may be useful."

The door-knob turned sharply, and, peering from under the table, Skinner saw that Courtney had gone out of the room.

He hesitated whether to stay where he was or to attempt to escape.

It would be safer to stay longer; also he wanted to hear anything that might be said. On the whole, it seemed to him best to stay.

Footsteps sounded in the passage, Courtney and Valence entered the room together.

Skinner curled himself well up, and opened his ears widely.

"I don't care to discuss it with you at all!" were the first words he heard.

"Rupert, you must! For Vi's sake—for your people's—for your own!"

"Look here, what have you been ferreting out? I should never have thought you'd play the spy, Courtney!"

"Call it what you like—though you know well enough it was not spying! I know all there is to know, I think. Anyway, it seems impossible that anything worse should remain behind!"

There was bitterness in that speech; but, all the same, there was the true spirit of unselfish friendship in it. Skinner, hearing, quite understood that the speaker meant to stand by Valence.

Did Valence understand that? It hardly seemed like it.

"And now, I suppose, you intend to give me away?" he said.

"I intend to get you out of this mess if it's any way to be done!"

"You don't mean it, Arthur! You can't—"

"I mean it! There's nothing I won't do—in honour! But I don't see a way yet!"

"If I could get that thing from Hawke—"

"No good thinking of that! He will hang on to it for all he's worth! And you're badly enough dipped already, without trying anything still more desperate!"

"Not so sure of that! The bold game is the best. Arthur, do you think he knows—"

Valence paused.

There was bitterness in Courtney's voice again as he finished the sentence for him.

"That the cheque was forged? I am certain he does! It is on that fact he

is banking. It's not merely disgrace here he threatens you with; it's heavier disgrace in the world outside. Bad enough for a fellow to get the sack from his school; but schoolmasters sack for things that judges don't send fellows to prison for!"

Under the table Skinner drew a long, deep breath, and trembled with sheer excitement.

Here was news indeed! Valence was a forger!

Skinner was not really shocked, but he was no end keen to hear more. Not that he had then any scheme for turning the affair to his own advantage. It was, as he might have put it, "a bit too hot for that."

"You're rough on me, old man!"

Even to Skinner, who would whine on occasion, that seemed a cowardly whine.

Courtney must have thought it so; but when he spoke again his voice was gentler.

"I'm only putting it straight. It seems to me that you've never looked facts in the face at all. You gave Hawke that cheque to stave him off for a time; and you never thought that the very fact of its being post-dated would make him suspicious. If he had presented it for payment—and there's no law against paying-in such a cheque; the law doesn't recognise post-dated cheques—if he presented it for payment you were ruined at once. If he didn't, but hung on to it—well, he chose his own time for ruining you—that was all the difference! He reckons that you are in his grip, body and soul!"

"I'll show him! I'll show him!" hissed Valence. "Courtney, I'd kill the brute before this should come out!"

"Don't talk such rot!"

"I'll have that cheque back! If I have to burgle the place for it I'll have it back!"

"Rot, again! Hawke will take good care of it!"

Valence buried his face in his hands, and Skinner heard the sound of sobbing.

"What am I to do? What can I do?"

"I don't know. I'm trying to think. But I couldn't go to bed without seeing you, and letting you know that I will help all I can. Money doesn't seem much use; all we can offer Hawke would only be a sop to his greed. There may be some other way of dealing with him; but this sort of thing is clean out of my line, and I can't think of any way yet. Clear off now, Rupert, and sleep—if you can! I can't, though goodness knows I'm weary enough!"

Valence got up.

"I was a brute to you to-day, Arthur," he said, with a catch in his voice.

"But it wasn't really my fault; it was the babbling of those wretched spies of juniors!"

Skinner thought that just like Valence. Even in apologising he tried to shove the blame on someone else!

"Never mind that! It's all over. But promise me one thing, Rupert—you won't be such an utter idiot as to try to get that cheque from Hawke by force or by stealth!"

"All right. I promise," said Valence shakily. "Good-night, Arthur!"

Did Courtney believe him? Skinner did not, anyway. But then, Skinner was a liar himself, and knew better than Courtney how little a promise means to a liar.

The next half-hour or so was not a comfortable time for Skinner.

Courtney paced restlessly up and down the small study; and the spy feared every moment that the table might be thrust aside and his presence revealed.

But at last the prefect threw himself, fully dressed as he was, on his bed in the alcove, and within a few minutes

his regular breathing told that he slept. Nature had her way, in spite of the weight on his mind and heart. He had reached the limits of his endurance, and sleep came mercifully.

It came mercifully to Skinner as well as to Courtney.

Not that Skinner went to sleep where he was. But as soon as he was sure it was safe he stole out, and up through the dark passage to the Remove dormitory, where he found no one stirring.

What he had heard did not keep him from sleeping. Why should it, when it boded no danger to him?

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

What Skinner Told!

H ALLO, hallo, hallo!" The rising-bell had clanged out; but Harold Skinner still slept.

He had no chance of sleeping much longer, though, for Bob Cherry stood above him, a sponge dipped in icy-cold water in his hand.

"Yooop!"

Skinner awoke with a startled cry.

The sponge had descended a second before, and he came to consciousness from a dream in which he was an Arctic explorer, and had fallen into an ice-hole. It was not a pleasant dream; but Skinner did not like the reality much better.

"Where did you get to last night, Skinner?" asked the Bounder.

"That's my affair! You're not the only fellow who has private business now and then, Smithy! Keep that sponge away from me, Cherry, you rotter!"

"Give an account of yourself, or you'll get it again!" hooted Bob.

"Leave the cad alone, Bob," said Wharton quietly. "We'll see to it that he doesn't give us the slip to-night!"

"Right-ho! There's Snoop still dozing. I'll wake him up with the glad news that his dear pal Skinner hasn't really done a bunk," Bob replied, grinning.

Snoop did not appear delighted either with the awakening or the news which followed it.

"What do I care?" he snarled. "Best thing Skinner could do would be to clear out! I should never have been in all this trouble if it hadn't been for him—I know that! Though I can't for the life of me see why you fellows should make such a fuss about it!"

"Then you need making see!" growled Johnny Bull.

"I wouldn't bother about a trial if that was the only reason for it," said Donald Ogilvy, looking up from his basin. "You'll never make any of the rotters see that. It's not worth the trouble. But I'm all for the trial, all the same, because they ought to be put through it for being such cads, whether they can help it or not!"

Which may not have been logical, but which expressed the sentiments of most of the Remove with fair accuracy. There was really no hope of inducing Skinner & Co. to see the error of their ways; no hope of their amendment; but, all the same, they had to be punished!

Skinner devoted a good deal of thought during the day to the problem of how to evade punishment.

"They're as fixed on it as ever!" he muttered to himself over his lonely tea. "Can't think why they should care. A fellow would never have expected them to take it like this. What can I do?"

Billy Bunter looked in.

"All alone, Skinney?" he said affably. "I'll have some tea with you, if you don't mind."

"But I do mind!" growled Skinner. "Cut, you fat worm!"

"Oh, really, Skinney! You shouldn't talk like that to the only pal you've got in the Form! I'll have some cake. I don't suppose it's up to much. Rotten cakes they seem to make these days! But it will be better than nothing. And I'm practically starving. I saw Smithy go to No. 1, so I knew you'd be all alone."

Bunter did not trouble to cut the cake. There was only half-a-pound or so left, and he took the lump. Skinner did not protest. He merely eyed his visitor with lack-lustre eyes.

"I'm a pal of yours, Skinney, you know," went on Bunter, with his mouth full of cake. "I don't see a bit what they want to try you for because you happened to see old Courtney kissing Valence's sister. He, he, he! But they mean to do it. And Smithy's yarning with those other rotters about the tortures they're going to put you through. I heard them."

Still not a word from Skinner.

"Courtney's a soft idiot," rambled on Bunter. "He's let Valence knock him about because he's spoony on Vi. Would I? Catch me! But there won't be much more of that. Valence's number will be going up pretty soon, I'll bet! It's all over the school that he's in the merry dickens of a mess with some of the Cross Keys gang!"

"What?" snapped Skinner.

"Mean to say you haven't heard? Why, everyone knows, I should think. Even that silly ass Clavering—he and Russell and Ogilvy were talking about it a few minutes ago."

"Oh, get out of this! I don't want any of your rotten tales! Cut! Do you hear?"

Buter, having swallowed the last crumb of cake, had got all he had come for. He rolled out now, mumbling.

A sudden thought had flashed across Skinner's brain.

"They don't know it all, that's a dead-cert!" he said to himself. "And if they hadn't heard anything they wouldn't believe me. But, as it is—Now, I wonder if there's any way of saving my own skin in this?"

He thought hard, and he came to the conclusion that there was.

To anyone else it might have seemed that his plan would at best merely postpone his punishment. But even that was something; and Skinner had hopes of more. Indignation for an offence to another does not burn at white heat long among boys of fifteen or so. Let another twenty-four hours pass, and half the Remove would be willing to allow the matter to lapse. Time, Skinner thought, was on his side.

So he went up to bed with his plans carefully laid. He breathed no word to Stott or Snoop. The Remove might try and condemn Stott and Snoop for all Harold Skinner cared.

Wingate saw lights out. His "Good-night!" lacked its accustomed cheeriness. The skipper of Greyfriars was troubled.

"Guard the door, someone!" said Harry Wharton, as soon as Wingate had made exit.

"I'm there!" sounded the voice of Squiff.

"There's no need!" spoke up Skinner. "I'm not going to try to dodge you to-night. You'll forget all about your potty trial when I've told you what I've got to tell!"

He spoke boldly. His words rang with assurance.

"If we believe it!" scoffed the Bounder.

"I don't think you'll doubt it," replied

Skinner quietly. "I didn't mean to tell. It was by accident I heard. But I've thought it over, and it seems to me that if some of you fellows don't do something, the worst thing that ever happened to Greyfriars is going to happen to-night?"

"What! Worse than you coming here?" asked Vernon-Smith sardonically. "Must be pretty bad, then!"

"Oh, you can dry up! I don't expect you to believe, Smithy! But Wharton will, I'm sure!"

"Having a more capacious believery than I have—what?"

"If this is spoof, Skinner—"

"It isn't spoof, Wharton!" said Skinner quickly.

And again he spoke as though he were sincere. Perhaps, in a way, he was. Little did Harold Skinner care for Greyfriars. But his own nature enabled him to read Valence's better than Courtney could read it; and he did not believe that Valence would keep that promise if he were tempted to break it.

"Go on, then!" said Wharton.

"I'm not going to shout a thing like this out; you'll understand that when you hear it," said Skinner. "Anyone who wants to hear must come close."

Garments were donned hastily, and nearly all the Remove crowded round Skinner's bed.

The story he told was a queer mixture of truth and falsehood. He told them of the forgery—there were whispers of shock and surprise when they heard that, but few disbelieved—and of Valence's threat to attempt getting back the forged cheque by force or craft—burglary, if need be! But he did not tell them of the promise given; and he represented Courtney as having said that he washed his hands of the whole affair.

"A very ingenious yarn, Skinner!" said the Bounder mockingly. "I should like to hear how you came to get hold of it, though."

"I hid from you chaps in Courtney's study," confessed Skinner. "I was under the table, and couldn't help hearing."

"Well, I for one don't care to act on anything heard in that way," the Bounder said. "I'm going back to bed. Take no notice of him, Wharton. It's a pack of lies!"

But Harry Wharton felt that the Bounder's shrewd judgment was at fault for once.

"Suppose it shouldn't be, Smithy?"

"I'm not going to suppose anything of the sort. Skinner can't pull the wool over my eyes! Are we going to try these three rotters?"

"I think—"

"Right-ho! If you're going to start thinking, old scout, I'm off back to bed. It's too cold out here for that game."

"Johnny, what do you say?" asked Harry.

"Well, it's likely enough Skinner's lying. He generally is," said the downright Bull. "But he may not be. And I think it's up to us to do what we'd do if we believe him. We can take it out of his hide afterwards if he has lied."

"You say Valence means to go to-night, Skinner?" asked Harry.

"That's what he said."

"Well, he won't have gone yet. It's too early for burgling. And he'll go by the box-room, for certain. We can set a guard there. He must be stopped somehow."

"I'll go to the box-room now," volunteered Tom Brown.

"Right-ho, Browney! Someone shall come and relieve you in half an hour or so."

The New Zealander junior departed, and a number of the rest took counsel.

together. But the Bounder stayed in his bed.

"I'm out of this!" he said. "Skinney can't fool me!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Night of the Raid!

"COURTNEY!"

It was the Bounder who spoke, shaking the prefect by the shoulder as he lay in bed in the alcove of his study.

"What is it? Is that Vernon-Smith?"

"Yes. Get up at once! Valence has gone to the Cross Keys, and a lot of fellows from my Form are after him to stop him. Skinner said you'd washed your hands of the whole affair—and no one could blame you if you had. But it seemed to me you ought to know."

Arthur Courtney was wide awake now. He tumbled out of bed, and began at once to dress. The Bounder had switched on the light.

"Skinner? What can Skinner know about it?" he asked wonderingly.

"He was under the table last night. It's a long yarn. No time to tell it all now. Wharton took the job of stopping Valence in hand. I stood out. Wish I hadn't, for they've mullied it somehow. They have kept a watch in the box-room. But now they find he's gone by some other way. He isn't in his bed, that's a cert, for I've looked myself. I say, I'll go with you!"

"What are Wharton and the rest doing?" asked Courtney, hurrying on his clothes.

"They're after him—a crowd of them. Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, Linley, Singh, Bull, Field, Todd, Brown, and Delarey—may be one or two more, but I think that's all."

"But why?"

"They know. At least, they have heard Skinner's yarn about the forged cheque Hawke holds. By Jove, it's true! I see it by your face!"

"Yes, it's— But we can't go into that now! Come along! If only I can get at him before he attempts this mad thing!"

The Bounder's shrewdness had failed him in one particular—not in all. He had not believed Skinner's statement that Courtney had washed his hands of the whole affair; that would not have been like Courtney. And it was this doubt that led him to the prefect's bedside.

Later, he regretted that he had gone—grieved for it with a grief few would have believed him capable of feeling. Yet he knew he had done right—done what Courtney would have had him do. And in that, at least, there was comfort.

In the passage someone spoke, rather nervously,

"It's me—Clavering! I don't want to seem interfering; but may I go with you fellows? There's a raid on, I believe; I heard the guns in the distance just now!"

"All the more reason why you shouldn't come," said Courtney, straining his ears for the sound of the anti-aircraft guns.

He heard them now, and he was almost glad to hear them. Surely this would turn back Valence from his mad enterprise!

But he saw the need of haste, and in his haste he thought little of either of the juniors. But when he was outside the school wall, in bright moonlight, they were still with him.

They were not with him a moment later, for he was off to Friardale with the speed of a deer. Even Clavering could not stay the pace with him, and the

Bounder, not long out of sanatorium, was left behind by Clavering.

The boom of the guns came to all three. At first Courtney heeded it little; his mind was in a turmoil. That Valence's secret should have become known thus—that he should have gone after his promise—that the Reinovites should have followed to prevent him—it was all like some wild nightmare! The air-raid seemed a trivial thing—a circumstance of no real importance at all.

Courtney ran on. The nearest guns of all were firing now; the hostile aircraft must be close at hand.

Through his mind there flashed the thought of the loyal juniors who had gone out on an errand of rescue for the old school's sake. It was not for Valence's sake, he knew; they had no reason to care for Rupert Valence.

He must find them—get them under cover somewhere. Valence had enough on his head already. If anything happened to Wharton or any of the rest it would make matters a thousandfold worse!

Boom, boom, boom!

Through the clear air the sound of the guns came as if from very near. And now Courtney was aware of another sound, a far more ominous one—the drone of powerful engines somewhere above.

He halted, and looked up.

There they were, very plainly visible in the moonlight, flying audaciously low. They had passed the coast defences, and knew that there was comparatively little fear farther inland.

Three of them—three of the assassin aeroplanes, out to wreak a base revenge on a peaceful and sleeping countryside! They seemed to hover over Friardale.

Clavering saw them, too, and Vernon-Smith, in Clavering's rear. But no more than Courtney did either think of turning back.

The Bounder was regretting bitterly that he had not gone with Wharton and the rest. It would have been better to share any danger they had to face.

There was no such thought in Clavering's mind. He had not been asked to join the expedition. Perhaps he could not have explained why he held on now, instead of returning to the school and to cover.

Crash!

That was a bomb, not a gun! Courtney raced on. He had reached the village now.

"Courtney!"

It was Harry Wharton's voice that hailed him. He pulled up at once.

The crowd of juniors poured out from a shed by the roadside. They had obeyed the natural instinct to take cover. The shed would not have served any sort of safeguard in the event of a direct hit; but in air-raids a direct hit is an off-chance, and far more deaths and injuries result from the failure to take cover against the fragments of exploding shells.

"Get back!" said Courtney sharply. "You're best in there—nothing in Friardale that would stand up against a bomb that dropped fairly on it! They're very close."

"Just up above us—and not far above, either," said Delarey coolly.

His face was upturned.

Most of the rest were looking up, too. There was no funk among them. This was not their first air-raid, and, in any case, they were not the funky sort.

"Seen Valence?" asked the prefect.

"No," replied Johnny Bull. "But it's certain he's out somewhere. He wasn't in his study."

Clavering dashed up, panting.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry.

"Here's another of them! Not sent to fetch us back, are you, Clavering?"

"No. Came with Courtney, but he got ahead. Vernon-Smith's behind. Where's Courtney off to?"

The senior had gone on. The Cross Keys was but a couple of hundred yards or so ahead. If Valence were there—but surely he could not be!

"No good standing here," said Squiff.

"Let's—"

Crash!

A bomb had fallen within a very short distance of them. They heard the sounds of falling masonry, and saw fragments thrown into the air. But there came no shriek of pain or fear. The house struck was, luckily, empty.

"Hi! Where are you going, Clavering?"

The new fellow did not answer. He was following Courtney.

"Here's the Bounder!" said Peter Todd.

Vernon-Smith was panting far more than Clavering had been. But he was game.

"Where's Courtney?" he jerked out.

"Gone on," answered Frank Nugent.

The Bounder did not even halt for breath. He ran on also. And all the rest followed. It was impossible to stay where they were while others went, though it was difficult to see what could be gained by going.

"Great Scott! It's the Cross Keys, and it's on fire!" gasped Tom Brown.

Above, the droning noise was still audible; but it was lessening in volume now. The Huns were making their way farther inland. They had bigger game on foot than little Friardale. But on their way over the village they had dropped three bombs, and one of them—an incendiary bomb—had struck the Cross Keys!

Outside the inn stood a crowd of frightened and gasping villagers. But not everyone was panic-stricken; already some were at work fetching water.

As the juniors came up they saw Courtney make a dash into the burning building.

"Come back!" shouted a hoarse voice. "You'll go to your death! You ain't got a chance!"

"Upstairs, if you will go—first room on the right!" howled another voice, which the Bounder recognised as that of Jerry Hawke.

Courtney dashed on, and disappeared into the inferno of smoke and darting flame.

"He's in there—Valence!" shouted Clavering. "There's been a row. I don't understand what happened; but they put him insensible in a bed-room—and forgot all about him when they bolted, the cowards!"

"'Twasn't our fault!" piped Cobb, the landlord of the Cross Keys shrilly. "What right had he breakin' in? If anyone swings for this—"

"Somebody ought to!" cried Harry Wharton. "Oh, great heavens! Old Courtney! We must help him!"

"Come on!" cried the Bounder.

No one ever knew whether he or Wharton or Clavering was first inside the burning building. No one had time to think about it, for they followed as one man. Bob Cherry and Squiff, Tom Brown and Peter Todd, Frank Nugent and Piet Delarey, Inky and Johnny Bull, and Mark Linley—not one hung back!

They might not be able to help. They were not sure that they could help. But they were game to share Courtney's risk—game, one and all!

"Stop!" panted Wharton. "We can't do anything till they get down, and our weight on the stairs may—"

He broke off, and stood as if spell-bound. They all stood and watched.

The staircase was in flames. Smoke surged around Courtney as he came down it with the insensible form of Rupert Valence in his arms. Flames licked at him; the charred stairs seemed crumbling under his tread. But he held on.

Wharton was right. It could serve no useful purpose—it could only add to the deadly risk of the two seniors—if anyone attempted to mount and meet them.

They could but stand and wait, themselves singeing, wrapped in the stifling smoke that eddied around them—wait for the chance to rush in and save the two if the staircase gave way!

They held their breaths. Their very hearts seemed to stop beating.

Courtney made all the haste he could, but Valence was a heavy weight to carry. He moved slowly, as it seemed to those below—terribly slowly!

"Ah!"

The staircase broke beneath him, and he crashed down!

Their chance to help had come, and they took it.

Clavering and Bob, Squiff and Johnny Bull, seized Valence, and bore him out. Bob's overcoat burst into flames as they reached the open air. He tore it off and flung it down. Squiff's eyebrows were charred, and Johnny's hands were badly scorched.

"Keep back! No use crowding!" yelled Squiff, as a dozen men pressed forward now.

Inside, the rest bent over Courtney.

He had come down with the weight of Valence full on top of him, and it was plain that he was badly hurt.

"Clear out!" he gasped into Harry Wharton's ear. "Save yourselves! I'm done! I think my back's broken!"

Then he fainted.

Somehow, working with strength that they had not known was in them, the Bounder and Delarey and Mark Linley and Tom Brown tore a door from its hinges. And Bob and Squiff and Clavering and Johnny were back again, helping them. And Harry and Frank and Peter Todd and Inky, with all tenderness and care, recking nothing of the flames that singed and scorched, somehow lifted Arthur Courtney, and got him upon the door, and ready hands seized it, and hoarse voices cheered as they came out with their burden.

"What's this?"

It was Wingate who spoke, his voice full of alarm. And behind him were Mr. Quelch and Mr. Prout and Gwynne.

And others were coming up. Greyfriars had taken the alarm, and someone must have told what had become of the missing boys.

But they were past caring for any trouble that might ensue. Nothing could ever make them feel sorry that they had been there to drag Courtney out of the flames.

No one thought much of Valence. Yet it was Valence who had been saved—first by the old dum who loved his sister, and after that by the juniors who had scarcely thought of him, but had dared death for the sake of Arthur Courtney!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Through the Valley of the Shadow!

THAT night at Greyfriars was like no other night there, and the most callous of those who went through it will never forget it as long as they live.

No one could quite understand at first. But no one tried very hard, perhaps. For Courtney's fate seemed the one thing that mattered.

From the very first none but the most sanguine could feel much hope. Bob

Cherry tried to take a cheerful view, but it was a false cheerfulness that trembled always on the verge of tears. More than one fellow whose courage needed no further proving frankly broke down. Wingate could not speak for the lump in his throat, and Valence, when he came to himself and learned what had happened, was like a madman in his anguish of remorse.

It was not till later that his story was told to the Head, but it may as well be told here. He had broken his promise—had gone to the Cross Keys in the desperate hope of getting back the proof of his crime. And he had got inside. There Hawke and Cobb had come upon him, and Valence had been struck down in the row that followed. Frightened at what they had done, the two shady rascals had laid him on a bed to come to. The air-raid had made them forget all about him until they were out of the place, and then they dared not go back.

There were no classes next day. The shadow of death lay over the school. Fellows talked to one another with bated breath. The Bounder would speak to no one. He shut himself up in his study, and refused admittance to Skinner, who was in a terrible state. Even Bunter had no appetite.

Lower and lower dropped the shadow. The day was a wretched one, with grey skies and cold rain, but fellows paced the Cloisters and the quad, because to stay indoors seemed impossible. All clung to hope while there was the least vestige to cling to, but from the first hope had been small.

And at last it was known that all hope had passed. Arthur Courtney lay dying.

A life of real promise was ebbing out. For Rupert Valence, who was not worth it, as fine a fellow as Greyfriars had ever known had given his life—and "greater love hath no man than this."

No; perhaps it had not been for Valence. Some suspected that; some felt sure that in these last hours Courtney was comforted by the knowledge that what he had done had been done for Vi's sake!

It was Mr. Quelch who told those who had brought Valence and Courtney out of the flames. They had drawn together, as was but natural—all but the Bounder. And Harry Wharton fetched him. He would not have come for anyone else, even then.

Courtney had asked to see them all before he went. It could not harm him, Mr. Quelch said brokenly; all that was past.

And they went, all of them; the fellows who had known him long and the one who was almost a stranger. Just a last look at the handsome face grown strangely wan and haggard—a last touch of the feeble, dying hand that had been so strong—that was all. Wingate crept out of the room; he could not bear it longer. But he came back when they had gone, and he brought with him one at the sight of whom the dying face lighted up.

They knew she had been sent for, but no one saw her then but Wingate and her brother and the Head. Those four were with Courtney when the end came; his uncle did not arrive in time.

He had murmured a word of farewell when Wharton bent over him; and Harry, scarcely knowing what he did, had bent lower and kissed him upon the forehead, and the dying face had smiled. Wharton was the last of them all. When he got outside the Bounder had already disappeared; but Bob Cherry was waiting, and he flung his arm round Harry's neck and laid his head upon his shoulder, and sobbed like a child. And Peter Todd's face was working queerly, and

Delarey looked grim with the effort to disguise his emotion, and Frank Nugent was as broken down as Bob.

In the room they had left Valence knelt by the bedside, and George Wingate stood almost choking, and the Head had tears in his eyes. And Vi Valence—what did she feel?

At the last he rallied, and spoke strongly and bravely.

"I'd hoped—for a chance over there—with Rupert," he said. "But I suppose this is best. Rupert, don't grieve like that! You have your chance yet—it will all come right in the end. George, dear old man, good-bye! Vi—oh, Vi!"

They were his last words. He died with her arms around him.

And there came a time, but a few weeks later, when George Wingate thought that perhaps it was best so. No one at Greyfriars ever saw Violet Valence again after that day. It was not of grief she died, though her grief was great and terrible; but she died—and Wingate knew what her death would have meant to Courtney, if no one else did.

All Greyfriars followed the body of Arthur Courtney to its last resting-place. Skinner was there, haggard and—for the time, at least—remorseful. Wingate and North and Gwynne and Hammersley, the fellows who had shared the zest and thrill of many a hard-fought match with him; the juniors who had always liked and admired him, who had done their best to save him; the masters, one and all.

And which of them will ever forget the words the Head spoke when they had come back? He did not tell them the whole story—some of them knew it, though, and many could guess—and, indeed, he spoke few words in all. But his last words were words to remember.

"He died as he lived—a very gallant gentleman!"

The words rang out strong and resonant in Hall. But then the Head's voice broke. He could say no more. He turned away, and walked abruptly out.

Valence had gone then. They might hear of him later, perhaps. He would try to redeem himself, no doubt. And "over there" the chance might come to him to do it—even as Arthur Courtney had hoped.

But no one cared much about Valence. No one missed him greatly.

For Courtney most cared, and some grieved long and sincerely. His place would know him no more, but he left behind him an enduring memory—the memory of "A Very Gallant Gentleman"!

**(Don't miss "DANGER AHEAD!"
—next Monday's grand complete story
of Harry Wharton & Co., by
FRANK RICHARDS.)**

NOTICES.

Back Numbers, Etc., Wanted.

By Maurice Wilkinson, 6, Scott Street, Redcar—"Bob Cherry's Barring-Out," "Schoolboys Never Shall be Slaves," "Wingate's Folly," "Saving Talbot," "Figgins' Fig-Pudding," and "Fishy's Fag Agency."
By P. Millet, 11, Canal Walk, Southampton—"Gem" containing "The Race to the Tuckshop," "Bob Cherry in Search of His Father," "Schoolboy Policemen," "Tom Merry's Trip to Paris"—2d. each offered for clean copies.

By Miss Doris Benson, 95, High Street, Redcar—"Bob Cherry's Barring-Out," "Schoolboys Never Shall be Slaves," "Hero of Wales."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 520.

THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY.

No. 56.—Miss PRIMROSE.

THE headmistress of Cliff House School is quite a good sort, though, from the point of view of her own charges and the boys of Greyfriars and of Highcliffe, she may at times seem just a little bit absurd. For she is distinctly old-fashioned, and she does not realise the difference in ages that seems so important to the juniors. She will call a fellow in the Remove "my dear child"—a form of address which would cause the youngest fag in the Second to get on his ear. And the worst of it is that common politeness forbids the injured party showing his resentment.

But she is a good sort—no possible doubt about that! Witness the tea-parties at Cliff House. How many girls' schoolmistresses would allow so many of these? For all her old-fashioned notions about some things, she is modern enough to realise that it is good for both boys and girls to meet thus. Witness, too, the fact that the girls are fond of her. They may laugh at her themselves, and call her an old frump; but they don't like anyone else to run her down.

She is not always wise. She was not too wise when the guileless Alonzo, instigated thereto by Bulstrode and Skinner, tried his famous scheme to bring together two loving hearts—the hearts of Mr. Quelch and Miss Primrose. Bulstrode—so he said, and you may believe or not, as you please; but Alonzo believed—had heard Mr. Quelch soliloquising thus: "If I could but meet her alone, and tell her of my love! Oh, my sweet—my sweet Penelope!" And Skinner, by a remarkable coincidence, had heard Miss Primrose murmur to herself: "Oh, my beloved Horace! If he but knew the depth of my boundless love!"

Lonzy was surprised. He had not thought Mr. Quelch at all that sort of man. But Lonzy was touched. It seemed to him very hard that Mr. Quelch and Miss Primrose should both be pining for affection thus.

In point of fact, the Remove-master was as far from being in love with Miss Primrose as he was from feeling a tender passion for Mrs. Mimble. And the headmistress of Cliff House was not really gone on Mr. Quelch. It was another person altogether whom she had suspected of nursing in his bosom a tender flame—is a flame ever tender? Never mind. When one is discoursing about love one need not worry about accuracy!—for her. It was Mr. Phipps, then mathematical-master at Greyfriars, since gone elsewhere. Mr. Phipps had taken Miss Primrose for solemn and stately walks. He had not, it would appear, quite made up his mind to take her for a lifelong walk. But Skinner felt sure that the wire Lonzy was to send would be taken by

Miss Primrose as coming from Mr. Phipps, and as precluding a declaration on the part of that gentleman.

The notion of the wires was Lonzy's own. Each was to tell the recipient that someone who loved him—or her, as the case might be—was waiting at a certain spot—the same spot, of course.

But Skinner and Bulstrode thought that would not do. They were not sure that Mr. Quelch would go. They wangled it, however. The place of meeting was so arranged that Miss Primrose was brought to where it was tolerably certain Mr. Quelch, a man of fixed habits, would be found at a given time.



He was there. Miss Primrose was surprised when she saw him. But how could she doubt? He had never been specially attentive; but then, he was in every way a superior man to Mr. Phipps—and a much better match! So Miss Primrose was quite prepared to start on the romance of her life at short notice.

But Mr. Quelch wasn't prepared, on his side; and the interview was a very embarrassing one to him. Worst of all was it when the lady fainted in his arms, and at that moment the Head appeared!

Before she came to Mr. Quelch had bolted. It was the kindest thing he could do for Miss Primrose—and the best for himself!

The whole affair must have been very dis-

tressing to the good lady—it was certainly so to Mr. Quelch. And it was eminently distressing to the well-meaning Lonzy when he found out how far wrong he had got!

Taken alone, that episode would be likely to give the reader a very inaccurate notion of Miss Primrose. She has plenty of common-sense, as a rule, though that quality is not so conspicuous in her as is kindness of heart: It was no end good of her to invite the Greyfriars boys to attend her department classes. Department is not exactly a science—if it is a science—or an art—if it is an art—that the average boy is keen on. But how was Miss Penelope Primrose to know that? What she does not know about boys would fill a library!

And some of them were keen enough on going, though it was not department that attracted them.

Miss Primrose is no snob. She was quite willing to include Dick Trumper & Co. among her pupils in the science—or art—of department, though they might be looked down upon as Council School bounders by the Highcliffe nuts and the Greyfriars black sheep.

Do you remember when Harry Wharton got caught by the tide, and Miss Primrose made him go to bed, with a hot-water bottle, and sent for the doctor? She meant well. She did not realise that a wetting means very little to a healthy boy. To her it suggested dire possibilities of early death, no doubt. And she thinks a lot of Harry Wharton, you know. He at least always does his best to treat her with proper respect and politeness, though his patience was very sorely tried that time.

She is prompt to encourage signs of talent in any direction she can understand in the Greyfriars juniors. She sent for Billy Bunter once, having heard that he had abilities as an entertainer. Wasn't Bunter swanky? But pride came before a fall. Bunter never got to Cliff House that journey. And Tom Brown was fetched along to lecture on New Zealand.

It is not probable that Miss Primrose likes William George Bunter greatly; but her good nature makes her tolerant even of him, as of others who are capable of imposing upon it. She has not much discrimination where boys are concerned; one would not trust her to pick out the goats from the sheep. But she understands girls better. That seems tolerably certain, otherwise Cliff House would not be the well-managed establishment it undoubtedly is. For girls, as well as boys, will kick over the traces at times if the driver's hands are weak and timid; and, on the whole, there is not much kicking over the traces at Cliff House.

Extracts from "THE GREYFRIARS HERALD" and "TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY."

BUNTER'S BET!

By ROBERT DONALD OGILVY.

I SAY, you fellows, I've been disappointed about a postal-order!" Billy Bunter made that announcement in the Junior Common-room at Greyfriars, with a very serious face. All the fellows groaned. "Don't!" said Bob Cherry faintly. "Oh, really, Cherry—" "Mercy!" said Squiff. "Look here, Field—" "Try a new wheeze," urged Harry Wharton. "We're fed up on the postal-order, Bunter."

"But it hasn't come!" said Bunter. "Ha, ha, ha!" "Does it ever come?" hooted Johnny Bull. "We're you expecting it when you were a fag in the Second Form?" demanded Ogilvy. "If it does come now, it will be out of date, and you won't be able to cash it," said Nugent. "So don't worry about it." "I say, you fellows, it's all very well to cackle," said Bunter. "But I'm stony, you know. I was expecting a postal-order from one of my titled relations." "Which one—the duke or the marquis?" snorted Johnny Bull.

"Lord Bunter de Grunter, I suppose," said Bob Cherry. "Perhaps his lordship is busy waiting in the margarine queue, Bunter, and hasn't had time to send it." "I was going to ask you to cash it for me, Bob Cherry. I will hand you the postal-order immediately it comes, of course." "Don't!" said Bob. "Can't you see we're fed up on your postal-order, Bunter? Ring off, like a good chap." Billy Bunter blinked wrathfully at the grinning Removites. It never did seem to occur to Bunter that his postal-order story was wearing a trifle thin.

"I'm expecting it by the first post in the morning," he said.

"Bow-wow!"

"Don't you believe me, Bob Cherry?"

"Of course I don't," said Bob, in surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The fact is, I'm certain to get a postal-order in the morning," said Bunter. "If you care to bet on it, I'm your man."

"I don't bet, you fathead!"

Bunter sneered a fat sneer.

"You mean, you're afraid to back up your words!" he said scornfully. "If you're so jolly sure, put up your money on it. I'll give you five to one."

"Rats!"

"Then you ought to apologise," said Bunter loftily.

"You fat chump," said Bob Cherry warmly. "I'm not going to bet; but if I did, I'd give you a hundred to one."

"Same here!" chuckled Skinner. "If you've got any money to put up, Bunter, I'm your man. I'll stand five bob against a bob that it doesn't come."

"Well, I haven't got a bob," said Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lend me a bob, Wharton—"

"Not to bet with, you fat duffer!" said Harry Wharton. "Besides, you'd lose it."

"But I'm expecting a postal-order—"

"Bosh!"

"Smithy, lend me a bob," said Bunter pleadingly. "I'll settle up to-morrow, honour bright."

"Out of your postal-order?" grinned Vernon-Smith.

"I tell you I'll settle up. I suppose you can trust me!" said Bunter, with dignity.

"About half as far as I can see you," agreed the Bounder.

"I say, you fellows, you might lend me a bob," pleaded Bunter. "I say, Mauly, lend me a bob, will you?"

Lord Mauleverer opened his eyes. He was dozing on the sofa.

"Oh, yaas!" he said.

"Good! You're a good chap, Mauly!"

"Thanks awfully!"

Billy Bunter secured the shilling before Mauly thought of asking what it was wanted for. He held it up triumphantly.

"Now, Skinner, I'm taking your bet! You hand me the five bob now—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Catch me!" grinned Skinner. "I'll hand it to Smithy as stake-holder, if you like, if you hand over your bob."

"Done!" said Bunter.

Vernon-Smith laughed as he took the stakes. "You'll lose your bob, you fat duffer!" he said. "You know jolly well you're not expecting a postal-order."

"You'll see," said Bunter. "My titled relations, you know—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Mind, you hand me the stakes if my postal-order comes to-morrow—I mean, when it does."

"Certainly!"

"And you hand them to me if it doesn't," chortled Skinner. "That merry old postal-order has been coming since about the time of the Flood, and I really don't think it will happen along to-morrow."

"Wharton, old chap—"

"Hallo!"

"Lend me a tanner."

"Tanners are scarce, my fat tulip," said the captain of the Remove. "Wait till your postal-order comes, and you're rolling in wealth."

"I say, old chap, don't be mean! I'll tell you what, you lend me three d, and Bob

Cherry will do the same. I want it badly, you know. Of course, I shall settle up to-morrow."

"Oh, for goodness' sake take the tanner, and buzz off!" said Wharton, and he tossed a sixpence to the impecunious Owl of the Remove.

And Bunter buzzed off with a contented expression on his fat face.

II.

THE next day William George Bunter was very interested in the postman. The Remove fellows grinned as they noted it.

Whether Bunter ever really expected a postal-order they could not tell; certainly, if he did, his career was made up of a series of disappointments.

That celebrated postal-order never did arrive; and it was so well known at Greyfriars that the Owl of the Remove found it very difficult to borrow on the strength of his expectations.

But the fat junior never quite gave up hope; and on this especial day he was very keen in looking out for the postman.

Skinner chuckled over it.

The astute Skinner did not regard his five shillings as running the slightest risk. It was possible, of course, that Bunter might get his famous postal-order some day. But it would have been a remarkable coincidence if it had arrived on that especial day. It was, in fact, too remarkable a coincidence to occur. Harold Skinner was quite certain of bagging Bunter's bob.

After lessons that day, when the postman was due again, Billy Bunter waited for him at the gates. The Famous Five, who were also interested in the postman on their own account, joined him there.

Mr. Boggs came along at last.

"Letter for me?" chirped Bunter, at once.

"Yes, sir!"

Billy Bunter blinked triumphantly at Harry Wharton & Co. through his big glasses.

"What did I tell you?" he chortled.

"Let's see the postal-order!" grinned Bob Cherry; and Hurree Janset Ram Singh observed that the seefulness was the believability.

Mr. Boggs handed out the letter, and a good many of the Remove gathered round to see it opened.

Skinner looked slightly uneasy.

Was it possible that that remarkable coincidence had happened, after all?

"You open it, Smithy!" said Bunter. "I want it all fair and square. If there's a postal-order in it, I win the bet."

"That's so!" said the Bounder.

He slit the envelope with his penknife.

All eyes were on the letter now.

Billy Bunter's confidence had made an impression on the doubting Thomases.

"My hat!" ejaculated Vernon-Smith.

There was no letter in the envelope. But there was something else. And there was a general exclamation as the Bounder drew out a folded postal-order.

"Great pip!" roared Bob Cherry. "A postal-order! Oh, great Scott!"

"Who said miracles don't happen?" ejaculated Nugent.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Let's see it!" shouted Peter Todd. "Let's feast our aged eyes on it! This postal-order is worth seeing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peter unfolded the slip of printed paper.

It was a postal order for the humble sum of sixpence, payable to W. G. Bunter.

"Only a tanner!" said Peter Todd. "But there it is—a postal-order. Bunter wins the bet—and serve you right, Skinner, for being a betting blackguard!"

Skinner's face was a study.

Vernon-Smith, with a chuckle, handed over the stakes into the plump paws of Billy Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove gave a fat chuckle.

"I told you so!" he remarked.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Skinner. He caught the postal-order, and held it up. "That's titled in Bunter's writing!"

"What?"

"He sent it to himself!" yelled Skinner.

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Bunter, you fat spoofer—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say, you fellows, that's all right," stammered Bunter. "It—it's from one of my titled relations, you know—"

"It's the local postmark on the letter," said the Bounder, examining it.

"Got any titled relations in Friardale, Bunter?" chortled Squiff.

"Oh, really, you know—"

"That's what he borrowed a tanner from Wharton for!" yelled Skinner. "He went down to Friardale and bought a sixpenny postal-order and posted it to himself!"

"Spoofer!" grinned the Bounder.

"I—I say, you fellows, it—it's all right, you know!" stuttered Bunter. "A—a chap can send a postal-order to himself if he likes, can't he? Skinner bet that I shouldn't get a postal-order to-day—and I've got one. It doesn't matter who sent it. That wasn't mentioned!"

"Where's my five bob?" roared Skinner.

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

"Hold on!" said Harry Wharton, interposing. "You've lost your five bob, Skinner. It wasn't specified whom the postal-order was to be from. Bunter's had one to-day, that's certain, and he wins the bet."

"Hear, hear!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Of course—Wharton's a reasonable chap!" said Bunter, relieved. "You see, it's all fair and square, Skinner!"

"You—you—you—" stuttered Skinner.

"At the same time," continued Wharton. "Bunter is a spoofer, and he is not entitled to keep the stakes."

"Oh, I say, you know—"

"Moreover, betting is no class, said Wharton. "Skinner deserves to lose the money, and Bunter doesn't deserve to win it, so I suggest that the whole amount be put in the poor-box in Hall."

"Good egg!"

"No fear!" roared Bunter. "Catch me! Why, I—I—"

"We won't persuade you, Bunter—"

"I should jolly well think not—"

"We won't compulse you!"

"No fear!"

"We shall only frog's-march you round the quad until you decide to shove the cash into the poor-box."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I say, you fellows—"

"Collar him!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"Yaroo! I—I say, you fellows— Leggo! Oh, my hat! I—I want to shove the cash in the poor-box, you know!" yelled Bunter. "That—that's what I meant all along, you know! Yaroo! You can come and see me do it if you like! Yooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Bunter did!

THE END.

HERLOCK SHOLMES AT MONTE CARLO!

By PETER TODD.

THE weather is very hot, Jotson." I stared at Herlock Sholmes across the breakfast-table.

My amazing friend, well as I knew him, was always astounding me with some remark displaying his marvellous penetration.

"My dear Sholmes!" I murmured.

"It is a fact, Jotson."

"But from what premises, Sholmes, did you deduce this?" I could not help inquiring. "I do not deny the fact, but I am interested to know by what means you reached this conclusion. You know, I am studying your methods."

Sholmes smiled.

"It is very simple, Jotson—I may say elementary. We are now in the dog days —"

"True!"

"The sun is shining from a cloudless sky—"

"Undoubtedly!"

"And the thermometer registers a hundred and ten degrees in the shade. From these circumstances, Jotson, I deduce that the weather is hot."

"Wonderful!"

"Not at all. A simple deduction like that, Jotson, is nothing to what I could do if really roused."

"I am sure of it, Sholmes," I said, gazing at my amazing friend in admiration.

"However, returning nose ah neutral mutton," said Sholmes, dropping into French, as he often did. "I think it is time we had a holiday, Jotson."

"My dear Sholmes, I quite agree with you. I had thought of postponing all holidays till after the war. But, speaking as a medical man, I do not think a holiday would be quite so beneficial to us when we have become centenarians. Where shall we go, Sholmes? Blackpool, I believe, is still safe from bombardment by the unspeakable Hun."

"On the contrary, Jotson, I have the surest information that at Blackpool the beach is simply covered with shells."

(Continued on page 16.)

HERLOCK SHOLMES AT MONTE CARLO!

(Continued from page 15.)

"Good heavens!"
"Look at this advertisement, my dear Jotson, and tell me what you think," said Sholmes, passing me his copy of the "Upper Circles Post."

I glanced at the paper, and read the advertisement aloud:

"Enrol for National Service! Every man wanted—"

"Not that one, Jotson—farther down the page!" exclaimed Sholmes sharply.

"Sorry, Sholmes!"

I looked farther down the page, and read:

"Monte Carlo for the winter! The finest climate in the world! Casino open all the year round!"

I looked at Sholmes inquiringly.

"You are thinking of Monte Carlo?" I asked.

"I am."

"A good idea!" I said heartily. "I have often wished to break the bank at Monte Carlo, Sholmes, as has so often been done in newspaper advertisements. A very healthy climate, Sholmes; the visitor is likely to suffer from nothing but shock to the system."

"Exactly. I fear, Jotson, that your mental powers are hardly equal to the strain of breaking the bank, however."

"True!"

"I shall be there, however."

"My dear Sholmes, it is your intention to break the bank at Monte Carlo?" I exclaimed.

"Precisely."

"I have not the slightest doubt that you will accomplish that difficult task, Sholmes. The man who solved the baffling mystery of who killed Cock Robin is equal to any task."

"You are right, Jotson. Pack our bags, my dear fellow, and I will call at the Somnolent Office for our passports."

Sholmes buttoned his dressing-gown and left me, returning in an hour with a trunk full of the official papers required for our journey. We started for the railway-station, enjoying en route the mild excitement of an air raid. The same evening we were speeding southward for the delightful land of romance and roulette.

II.

"MONTE CARLO!" said Sholmes, yawning.

I stepped from the train, and fell headlong upon the platform.

I was unaccustomed to French trains, and unaware that there was a three-foot drop outside the carriage.

Sholmes' masterly mind, however, saved him from a similar disaster.

He landed carefully upon my neck, and sat there for a few moments to recover himself.

"My dear Sholmes," I murmured, "far be it from me, your faithful follower, to wish to incommode you in any way, but that is my neck."

"True, my dear fellow!" remarked Sholmes.

"If you could find something else to rest upon, Sholmes—"

"Really, Jotson, it is somewhat inconsiderate to interrupt my mental aberrations with irrelevant remarks!" said Sholmes sharply.

"True!" I admitted.

"Little boys, Jotson, should be seen and not heard," added Sholmes.

I felt the truth of this remark, and was silent.

After a time Sholmes rose, took me gently by the ear, and lifted me to my feet.

"Proceeding noose ah neuter hotel, Jotson," he said in French.

"C'est vrai! Along dong!" I replied in the same language. "J'ai boko de swift."

We proceeded.

Monte Carlo was crowded by a gay and fashionable crowd.

Amid the aristocratic throng I observed grand dukes, marquises, company promoters, pickpockets, Cabinet Ministers, and many other representatives of the luxurious classes.

In fact, the elite of the whole world had been drawn to the beautiful resort by the shores of the blue Mediterranean, where riches cease from troubling and the occupants of the Suicides' Cemetery are at rest.

We reached our hotel, and sat down to a luxurious repast of cheval a la Froggee, chien a la mode, and chatte a discretion, followed by biscuits de chien and eau froide.

Sholmes leaned back in his chair and lighted a Flor de Cabbagio with an air of contentment.

"Try the cigars, my dear fellow," he said. "The Cabbagios are very good, and the Clouxflour are excellent."

"And now the casino," I said, as I lighted my cigar after a busy quarter of an hour with the French matches.

"The casino, Jotson, closes at twelve," said Sholmes. "It is now only ten."

"Then we have two hours."

"Three!" said Sholmes calmly.

I gazed at my friend in astonishment.

"In three hours, Sholmes," I remarked, "the casino will have been closed for an hour."

"Exactly!"

"I do not quite understand you, Sholmes. Did you not come here to break the bank at Monte Carlo?"

"Certainly!"

"To deprive the croupiers, Sholmes, of their tons of ill-gotten wealth?"

"Precisely!"

"Yet you do not propose to visit the casino until after it is closed!" I exclaimed.

"Correct!"

"I confess that I am quite in the dark, Sholmes."

"My dear Jotson," said Sholmes, with a somewhat bored look, "leave the matter to me. Your mentality, my dear fellow, is hardly equal to the strain."

"True! But—"

"There are two ways of visiting the casino," Sholmes explained. "If you wish the bank to break you, you visit it when it is open. If you wish to break the bank, you visit it after it is closed."

"Sholmes!"

"Wait and see, my dear fellow. Noose verrong!" said Sholmes. "Pass me another Cabbagio, and explode a match for me—thanks!"

And Sholmes smoked on, and refused to enlighten me further.

III.

IT was not till an hour past midnight that Sholmes moved. Then he finished the bottle of red Stummackakeo wine, and rose.

"Time, Jotson!"

I followed him from the Hotel de Fleece.

"And now, Sholmes—"

"We are going to break the bank, Jotson."

He paused under the shadow of a palm-tree, and took a jummy from his pocket, and examined it carefully. "Right!"

"Have you brought your money, Sholmes?"

"My dear Jotson, it is an old rule of casino punters to play with the bank's money whenever possible. That is my system."

"Ah! Have you a system, Sholmes?"

"Undoubtedly!"

"By which you will win against the bank?"

"Without doubt!"

"And break the bank?" I exclaimed.

"Indubitably!"

"I do not doubt your assurance, Sholmes, but how can you work this system, no doubt excellent, after the casino is closed?"

"I could not work it while the casino was open, Jotson. However, wait for me under the palm-trees here, and whistle if you see a policeman."

"A policeman!" I ejaculated.

"Yes. The police, Jotson, in this delightful place, are paid their wages by the casino authorities, and they would undoubtedly interfere to prevent me from breaking the bank by my infallible system."

Before I could reply, he left me.

I waited anxiously.

Great as was my faith in the remarkable powers of Herlock Sholmes, I could not fathom how he hoped to contrive to break the bank at Monte Carlo after the casino was closed for for the night.

However, I knew Sholmes too well to doubt.

I waited.

In half an hour he rejoined me. He was carrying a sack, which clinked musically as he moved, and his jummy was under his arm. He smiled.

"Success, my dear Jotson!"

"Sholmes!" I exclaimed. "You have broken the bank?"

"I have!"

"Wonderful!"

"Not at all, my dear fellow. But now let

us make for the railway-station, and we shall catch the night express."

"Without returning to our hotel, Sholmes?"

"Decidedly!"

"But we cannot pay our bill unless we return!"

"That is why it is not necessary to return, Jotson."

"True!" I exclaimed, struck by this masterly reasoning of my amazing friend.

"Come!" said Sholmes.

And we departed.

IV.

HOME once more amid the familiar sights and smells of Shaker Street, I asked Herlock Sholmes for the usual explanation. But Sholmes shook his head. The system by means of which he had succeeded in breaking the bank at Monte Carlo was a secret he did not care to impart, even to his faithful Jotson.

"Enough, my dear fellow, that we have been successful," he said, with a smile.

"Enough that we can now settle Mrs. Spudson's bill, and face the man, when he calls for the instalments on the furniture, without fear. That is enough—or, as the French say, c'est asinine."

And Herlock Sholmes turned to the cocaine-cask, and said no more.

THE END.

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday :

"DANGER AHEAD!"

By Frank Richards.

Leonard Oswald Clavering, who is really Tom Redwing, of Hawksellif, though he gets on well with most of the fellows at Greyfriars, is not altogether happy there. It is difficult for any honest and honourable fellow to be happy when he is in a false position; and his position is not only a false, but also a very difficult one, for there are suspicions about him among the Removites who don't like him. Next week you will read of a new trouble for him. He hears that the old clergyman who has acted as tutor and guardian to the real Clavering is coming to Greyfriars—a thing that had never been anticipated. What is he to do? Mr. Shepherd will know at once that he is an impostor, of course.

The dilemma is a very real one. But it is settled in a manner for which he himself is not responsible, as you will discover when you read this fine yarn.

ANOTHER GREAT STORY!

On Friday in next week will be published another splendid school story, which you positively cannot afford to miss. It is No. 413 of the "Boys' Friend Library," the price of which was changed with the New Year from 3d. to 4d. The author is Mr. Owen Conquest, and the title of the story is:

"THE FEUD AT ROOKWOOD!"

For three years now Mr. Conquest's stories of Rookwood have been appearing in the "Boys' Friend," and have won for him many thousands of admirers. Rookwood has come to be almost as well known—the Editor of the Green 'Un might say quite as well known, but I am not prepared to go to that length—as St. Jim's and Greyfriars; and Jimmy Silver and the rest of the Classics, with the three Tommies of the Modern Side, are "familiar in our mouths as household words." But this is the first story in book form which tells of them, and I have no doubt whatever that it will meet with a hearty reception. I should advise you to order at once, or you may be told that the volume is sold out!

Your Editor